Koviloor Digital Library

Himalayan Series.—No. XXVII.

THE LIFE
OF THE
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

BY

HIS EASTERN AND WESTERN DISCIPLES,
THE ADVAITA ASHRAMA, HIMALAYAS.

THE SEMI-CENTENARY BIRTHDAY MEMORIAL EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

IMS07703

PUBLISHED BY THE SWAMI VIRAJANANDA FROM THE PRABUDDHA BHARATA OFFICE, ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS.

1914.

[All Rights Reserved.]

Price 3 Vols. Rs. 7 : Foreign $ 3 or 12 Shillings.

Koviloor Digital Library

PRINTED BY K. C. GHOSH
at The Lakshmi Printing Works,
64-1, Sukea's Street, CALCUTTA.

COPYRIGHT REGISTERED UNDER ACT XXV OF 1867.

All rights of translation and reproduction are strictly reserved by the Swami Virajananda, President, Advaita Ashrama. Permission for translation will be granted on certain terms. For particulars enquiries have to be made to him.

Koviloor Digital Library

Table of Contents.

		PAGE.
LV.	In the Shadow of the Future ...	1
LVI.	After the Passing of the Master ...	5
LVII.	In the Glorious Dawn	13
LVIII.	The Forming of the Monastic Order	21
LIX.	The Life of Tapasyâ at Baranagore	27
LX.	The Rhapsodies of Insight ...	34
LXI.	The Days of the Saints	40
LXII.	The Parivrâjaka Tendency ...	52
LXIII.	The Itinerant Monk	59
LXIV.	The First Disciple	73
LXV.	Râmakrishna or Pâvhâri Bâbâ ? ...	84
LXVI.	Amidst Shifting Scenes ...	98
LXVII.	Wanderings in the Himalayas ...	110
LXVIII.	In Beautiful Alwar	129
LXIX.	With the Mahârâjâh of Khetri ...	142
LXX.	In the Province of Guzerat ...	155
LXXI.	In the Presidency of Bombay ...	176
LXXII.	The Meditation at Kanya Kumârî ...	192
LXXIII.	Further Glimpses of the Parivrâjaka Life	209
LXXIV.	In Madras and Hyderabad ...	229
LXXV.	The Consolidation of Intention ...	248
LXXVI.	On the Way to Lands Beyond the Seas	262
LXXVII.	Early Days in America ...	271
LXXVIII.	The Parliament of Religions ...	283
LXXIX.	The Import of the Swami's Address ...	295
LXXX.	After the Parliament	305
LXXXI.	Varying Experiences as Preacher ...	323
LXXXII.	The Calcutta Town-Hall Meeting ...	338
LXXXIII.	The Beginning of Work ...	353
LXXXIV.	Vedanta Ideas Gaining Ground ...	370
LXXXV.	At Thousand Island Park ...	386
LXXXVI.	The First Visit to England ...	399
LXXXVII.	Establishing the American Work ...	412
LXXXVIII.	The Odds and Ends of American Work	432

Koviloor Digital Library

Koviloor Digital Library

LV

IN THE SHADOW OF THE FUTURE.

The scene shifts from the burning-ghat to the Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore after a few days' sojourn at Cossipur. The young disciples who, with Noren, stood round the extinct form of their Master are subsequently seen garbed in the ochre robes of monastic life and grouped together as the monastic Brotherhood of Sri Ramakrishna, with Norendra as the leader. The relics of the Master which had been carefully gathered, now reposed in a tabernacle-like shrine in the monastery itself. A room was set apart for religious service and the picture of Sri Ramakrishna was surrounded with the halo of religious worship and the fragrance of flowers and incense. The boys who are now monks faced the utmost poverty which was their lot. Sleep was often forgotten, for the monks led by Norendra would spend night after night in prayer and song and spiritual exercise. He was *the Monk* amongst them all, urging them on, spurring them onwards to burning renunciation and intense devotion.

Henceforth, Noren after having spent some years as a wandering monk becomes the Swami Vivekananda. The boy who sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna becomes an Apostle Paul of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and a Teacher of the highest Vedic Wisdom to the modern World. He becomes the Central Figure in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago and the First Oriental since the time of Christ, who came with a Divine Message for the peoples of the West. He becomes the Great Patriot and the Great Prophet to the Indian peoples. But not alone this. He becomes the builder of monasteries, and the founder of a great philanthropic organisation, known as the Ramakrishna Mission.

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

The other disciples likewise develop. The Baranagore monastery becomes in the course of a few years the great monastery of Belur ; the other disciples become abbots and missionaries and famine-relief workers, spending their lives in *Sâdhanâ* and prayer, and in loving service unto mankind. It is a tale that thrills in the narrative, showing how the Spirit of Sri Ramakrishna has worked, so that even when hardly twelve years elapsed since the passing away of the Master his name and his Message had encompassed the whole length and breadth of India,—aye, even countries across the seas as well.

And the Swami Vivekananda, for henceforth by this name Noren will be known, becomes a Holy Wanderer over the face of the earth, preaching the Gospel of another Redemption, in which there is no Terrible Crucifixion and fear of Eternal Hell, but Supreme and Joyous Illumination, —the story of which is fully told in the subsequent portion of this Work.

Now Norendra steps out from the background of the garden and the temple of Dakshineswar and the garden-house of Cossipur into the open fields of the world, staff in hand and clad in the monastic garb of the Sannyâsin. The youth has become the man. The boy who acquired spiritual power and realisation becomes the Saint and Prophet who distributes the fruits of realisation and translates personal power into impersonal service. Noren, the disciple, becomes the Swami Vivekananda—the Teacher. He who sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna becomes himself the Master to numerous devotees and disciples. He who as the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna sought for spiritual power becomes the embodiment of a radiant consciousness, rich with contagious spirituality. Norendra Nath Dutta is transformed into the monk Vivekananda, and the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna pervades him. Indeed, on a close examination of the personality of the Swami Vivekananda one recognises certain traits and characteristics of the Man of Dakshineswar. It is as though the Same Personality were trying to express itself through a

Koviloor Digital Library

new and vigorous body. The Personality, the Mother, is One, though the body, or vehicle of expression, is another. The same Realisation stands manifest. The same Illumination shines forth. Thus the disciples of the Master have lived the Ecstasy of Dakshineswar many times over again in the presence of the Master's chief disciple.

The boy who was Noren now becomes a great spiritual chieftain, the *guru* of several of the princes of India, but in a more special sense the *guru* of the group of devoted people who become his personal disciples both in the West and in the East.

He travels the length and breadth of India ; aye, not alone of India, but of the whole world. He is impelled hither and thither by the Winds of God, bearing a great message charged with his own luminous realisation. He is seen in jungles and in forest-caves, in the palaces of Maharajahs and in the homes of the lowly and the poor, in the hermitages of ascetics and in the company of the "untouchables." He is on the dusty highroads of his native land and later on in Europe and America. He is now seen in Hrishikesh where monks are counted by hundreds ; he is seen on the hilltops of the Himalayan range. Then, perhaps, the scene shifts and he is seen in the great cathedral of Saint Peter's in Rome, pondering over the stupendous grandeur and apocalyptic revelation of Christianity.

From now, however, one is ushered into a world of majesty and power of the Swami himself. Previously, one dwelt with *Noren* and his divine Master in a world of ecstasy and beatitude. Now the untiring energy of the great soul of the Swami Vivekananda is made manifest in the gradual unfoldment of his life-work. It is all work and illumination. It is the great motive power of a Tremendous Will, building and expanding the contents of its desire into vast spiritual proportions. It is also suffering and meeting with difficulties and the successful overcoming of them. One is brought soul to soul with a powerful, fiery and yet most sweetly human personality

Koviloor Digital Library

whose presence suggests at all times the truths and realities and the great Peace beyond the strife of life. There are shades of laughter and sweet human sentiment, as well. But the dominant note is an *intense monasticism* and a supreme revelation, the latter being not only a climax of the spiritualised intellectual consciousness, but verily the Radiance of Divinity made most humanly manifest. One is brought into contact with a personality of tremendous earnestness and overwhelming sincerity, the windows of whose mind are always thrown wide open to admit the grand day-light of the Eternal Truth.

Withal he had the human side also. He was a human personality who enjoyed the living of life, who was filled with a joyous sense of humour and fun and an amiable light-heartedness. In his heart he was always the Boy of Dakshineswar. But one never knew when the *Revelation* might come on in the sudden reserve of his personality disclosing the supreme illumination of his thought and the great depth of his spirituality. From fun to spiritual illumination and from the heights of thought to the joyousness of laughter,—a sudden transition, a curious admixture of personal elements! And yet within it all was the *monk*, the *prophet*, the *teacher*.

The illumination of his mind touches one with the complex grandeur of his personality ;—at once patriot, priest and monk, and the solver of Indian social problems. It was as if his soul was constantly with his God and his thought and love constantly in the service of man. And the narrative continues ;—and the Light shines forth effulgent in the story,—that Light which was and which is RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA.

Koviloor Digital Library

LVI

AFTER THE PASSING OF THE MASTER.

The death of *Mahâpurushas*, whilst an incident of sorrow, is a great incentive to the Life of Ideals ; even so unto the devotees and disciples was the passing of Bhagavân Sri Ramakrishna. They were overwhelmed with a powerful stimulus to the exalted consciousness and found themselves strengthened by a Presence which they knew to be that of the departed Master. The life of the Man of Dakshineswar was not to end in the death of the body ; it was to express itself in an eternal flow of spiritual life and the Knowledge of the Indestructible. And the channels for this flow were the hearts of the devotees and the souls of these young men who at the touch of Sri Ramakrishna had renounced the world, becoming monks. The Man of God proves the reality of the Resurrection and Ascension in the posthumous influence of His Teaching, and the Presence of His Spirit beyond the touch of death is seen in the growth and glorious promise of His Gospel.

Immediately after the *Mahâ-samâdhi* of the Master, the disciples were too bewildered to know what to do. And yet in the Womb of Time there was destined to be the immediate birth of wondrous things. Those young men whom Sri Ramakrishna had initiated as Sannyâsins had irrevocably made their decision to completely give up the world. The passing of the Master, though long expected, in one sense, was yet too unexpected in another ; and so they were buried in great grief. Their hearts were sorrowful and their meditation upon the Master mingled curiously with ecstasy and pain.

Meanwhile there was still a week before the agreement for the house at Cossipur would expire. Therefore the monks came here daily, some living here, most of them spending the

Koviloor Digital Library

nights in this place. And what nights! The whole time was spent in *tapasyâ* and *sâdhanâ*. Meditation, song, ecstasy, pain, blessedness and sorrow alternately filled their hearts, and worship to the Master formed a part of their life from the very beginning. Sri Ramakrishna was treated as though he were still in the body. Oftentimes the monks assembled in the room where the Bhagavân had lived and prostrated themselves before the relics he had left behind. They redoubled and trebled their spiritual endeavours in a mad effort to break down the walls of death and find themselves in union and at oneness with the Master. And those householders who were disciples, came and held long converse with the monks; and the topic was only one,—or rather it was manifold, gathering itself, however, invariably round one theme,—their Great Master. Here in this very house in which he had lived, they recalled over and over again the last days of the Master and the memorable days of Dakshineswar; here Norendra entertained them with thrilling tales of the Master's life, and his mission and teachings, until their bodies trembled with ecstasy and death was swallowed up in victory. And those who dwelt near by wondered and marvelled at the life of these young men. A great spirit filled the whole place and throbbed with wonderful vitality and power.

And one night, in the very week following upon the *Mahâ-samâdhi* of the Master, while Norendra and a brother-disciple were walking in silent meditation in the garden, they saw, all of a sudden, a Shining Figure before them. Was it the Presence of the Master! Verily, he was with them, more than in a sense of the Resurrection, for he had never died, only his in a personality had separated itself from the body, and that personality of the Master shone to them more than ever before. It was the Great Spirit of Divinity manifest unto them, as they had seen it in the Man of Dakshineswar. The Luminous Figure had come so suddenly but both perceived it at one and the same time. Norendra, would not speak, fearing lest it might be only an illusion; but when the other disciple spoke out, "Noren, See! See!" he was convinced that

Koviloor Digital Library

there was not the least possibility of the apparition being an illusion. The two called to the others who were within the house, and as they were hurrying to come, lo, the Figure vanished ! But in its stead a Presence lingered, though invisible ; and it radiated Power and Glory and Transcendent Blessedness. Verily, was the Glorified Ramakrishna, the Moving Spirit amongst them.

The time drew near when the Cossipur house must be given up. Now that Sri Ramakrishna was no more, speaking physically, those of the householders who had contributed towards the expenditure were about to withdraw their aid. Naturally the question arose,—what was to become of the monks ? and it prompted conflicting answers. Some of the householders out of their love for the lads thought, as all householders do, "How will they get on ; we cannot leave them to wander about like ordinary shâdhus. They are still boys with bright prospects of life before them. Let them return to their homes. That is wisest for their own happiness as well as that of their families." But not for one moment did the monks waver ; they were determined to give up the world. In the days before the passing of their *Gurudeva*, however, several of them, even while serving him, were preparing for the final examination for the degree of Bachelorship of Arts, and they had almost completed their studies. Their parents and guardians urged upon them the necessity of passing the examination and obtaining the degree, even if they did not want to live the worldly life, saying that it would lend dignity and authority to them as monks. They said that it would add to their position as disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and in their hearts they hoped that once home, the boys would remain there. The pressure was intense, and in order to please the superiors and also thinking it proper themselves, several of them returned to their homes to finish their collegiate studies or to settle family matters ; that done, they intended to leave everything and live the monastic life.

But some of the monks had already given up their homes.

Koviloor Digital Library

Where were they to live? This heightened the discussion amongst the householders, and of them four in particular desired to have the monks band themselves together in a Brotherhood and live in a monastery. These were Babus Balaram Bose, Surendra Nath Mittra, Girish Chandra Ghose and Mohendra Nath Gupta, and these were amongst the more important of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees. They came forward and took the side of the monks, arguing with the others for the establishment of a monastery, while their opponents insisted that it was foolishness even to think of doing so, for, from what direction would money be forthcoming! The monks argued, "How can we live the worldly life after seeing and serving such a living example of renunciation and realisation? Was not his teaching, the renunciation of *Kâmini-Kânchana*? Are we not taught never to think of the morrow? Who cares for money? We will beg for our food from door to door leading a wandering life of non-attachment. Surely the Master will take care of us!" And those who were going to their homes for a short time to finish their studies said, "As soon as we have done with our examination, we shall also leave home and wander." Hearing this he who loved them most dearly, Babu Surendra Nath Mittra, a man of wonderful heart, came forward with tears in his eyes and said, "Brothers, where will you go! Let us rent a house where you may stay together and where we householders will find a temporary refuge from the worries of the world by coming to you from time to time. I used to give a little towards the expenses of the Cossipur Garden-house. I will gladly continue that sum and you can at least hire a house and live very simply." Hearing this, the monks were overcome with emotion, and in their hearts they wept with joy.

So in accordance with the good-will of this saintly householder, whom Sri Ramakrishna had tenderly called a *Dânâ*, or demon of Shiva, the monks secured that house which became the Baranagore monastery. This was situated midway between Dakshineswar and the City of Calcutta. It was a dreary place. For years it had had no tenant. For years

Koviloor Digital Library

it had the appearance of being deserted. It was in fact in a ruined condition and sadly in need of repair. Besides being very old, it had the reputation of being haunted. It was two stories in height, but the lower story was absolutely useless, being the resort of lizards and snakes. The gateway had long since tumbled down. The verandah which flanked the front part of the upper story showed signs of decay; the main room at the back part where the monks lived was in a most dilapidated state. Indeed, none others would have lived there for fear of the building giving way. To the east of the building was another house which was used as a sort of chapel where the family-God of the owners was worshipped by resident priest. To the west was a garden overgrown with weeds and tall brush and undergrowth so that it resembled a jungle. The rooms of the ground floor were never occupied during the time the monks remained there except one in which lived the gardener of the landlord. They were exceedingly damp and dingy, and filled with all sorts of rubbish which several generations of landlords had allowed to accumulate and made no effort to remove. The garden was peopled by tall Sovanjan and mango trees, and a *Vilva* tree, giving a sombre aspect to the place. At the back part was a pond which had become overgrown with moss and was the breeding-place of mosquitoes. The whole place was weird.

There were many thrilling tales current concerning dark deeds which, it is said, had been perpetrated in this house and compound, but this was of long ago, and, besides, the Sannyâsin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had no fear of ghosts. The monks had chosen this dreary retreat because of its cheapness, but especially because it was adjacent to the Baranagore burning-*ghat* where the body of the Master had been consigned to the flames. They desired to be near the sacred river also, as their Master always did, and the Baranagore monastery was but a few minutes' walk from the Ganges. Here the monks were glad to live, away from the turmoil of city life, in the solitude where few cared to interrupt their days of meditation.

Koviloor Digital Library

As has been seen, some of the monks lived permanently at Baranagore, coming thither when the house at Cossipur was abandoned. Others had gone to their respective homes for various purposes. Several had gone on pilgrimage. Norendra himself was compelled to visit home often for a short time, recognising it as a matter of conscience that he must first arrange the affairs of his family before he finally set out on the highways of monastic life, never to return even to the thought of home. But all the monks frequented Baranagore, visiting it often, Norendra himself spending the nights and a large part of the day there. From the passing of Sri Ramakrishna in the middle of August to the following December, the monastery was in a constant process of consolidation. Now one would join it permanently, now another. And Norendra was always the leader, urging on the monks to the Life of the Ideals.

That all the Sannyâsins eventually gathered together in a Brotherhood was largely the work of Norendra. Though battling with adverse circumstances he himself was all the time most keenly possessed with the monastic consciousness; gradually his family matters were being settled, and when he saw his way clear he immediately commenced dissuading those who had returned home for their examinations in January to give up their intentions. At any time of the day or night he would come as a whirlwind of spiritual energy to their respective homes. For very fear of him, because he disturbed their studies, some would even fasten their doors, refusing to see him. But he was not to be defeated in his purpose. He would hammer at the doors until from sheer nervousness they were forced to admit him. Then he would enter into conversation, sometimes for hours, strolling in the street, and would denounce them, outside the range of their guardians' hearing, for continuing their studies. He would persuade them to come with him to the monastery, and fire away at them until their resolves were burned up. And at the monastery they would give way to the spiritual impetus and be carried on the currents of ecstasy of song almost into

Koviloor Digital Library

the regions of insight. Then they would return home from the monastery in a day or so, and would again be at their books, and again on that very day Noren would pay them another visit with similar results. His arguments were overwhelming to them, for he would introduce the subject of the departed Master and the life of renunciation with such vividness of language and such intensity of spirit that he simply could not be withstood. He would say, "Get out of this bondage! No matter what anyone wishes, you are not to please others by throwing away your life to the winds. Do you not remember the departed Master? What is all learning but ignorance compared with the Jnânam of Realisation! It is inconsistent to yearn for renunciation and the fleshpots of the world at one and the same time. Give up the idea of the examination; let the degrees go! Until you can unlearn whatever you have learned, you cannot attain the spiritual life. Let us all give ourselves up to prayer and meditation; let us all give ourselves wholly and entirely unto Him! Let us know and realise God! What matters all other knowledge! It is nonsense; it is ignorance. Only the Master is real!"

Hearing this day after day, those monks who were still at their homes were overwhelmed. They felt that all that energy which they had employed in acquiring worldly knowledge for the pompous vanity of a University degree was so much wasting of time which might have been better devoted to the service of the Lord! So, one by one, they discarded their books and threw overboard their ambition to possess a degree. If they desired they could acquire knowledge without the college curriculum. Finally, towards the middle of December, he had them gathered in the monastery, and he and all of them went to reside there permanently. They abandoned everything; they left their homes and the promising future which beckoned many of them, and accepted the saint's lot,—a bare roof and bare food, with meditation and with prayer.

Norendra was like a raging lion, spiritually speaking; and his *gurubhâis* looked upon him as their leader, both because the Master had taught them to do so and because his person-

Koviloor Digital Library

ality unconsciously dominated every thought and desire of their inmost nature. Some of the monks regarded him even as the mouthpiece of the Master. Some thought that by obeying him they would please the Master Himself, whilst still others attached themselves to his person in a manner even as they had done to Sri Ramakrishna himself. But still Norendra was to them as their own brother and as their comrade. True, he gained their unbounded respect, even their reverence, but in Sri Ramakrishna the monks found inexplicable and overpowering Greatness, far beyond their understanding. He was the Ideal Itself, brilliant in vision. They had his blessing, they were his children, and he was as God to them. Norendra, on the contrary, was now the mediator for them between their own personalities and that Exalted State. Besides, the words of the Master concerning him came constantly to their minds. But did they ever in their zeal for Realisation dare to disobey him and run to excess in the practising of austerities, all that he would need to say was, "Did not the Master himself give all of you into my charge ?" And then, also, they could never escape the magnetism of his personality. His face, his speech, his eyes, the manner in which he walked among them, the way in which he showed his confidence in them, and cheered and spurred them on, even the way in which he admonished them, made him the unquestioning leader of their lives and the inspiring guide on their path. It was all an unconscious growth and understanding, and as the days grew older and older the more they came to understand him, the more they saw in him verily the Spirit of the Master himself incarnate as it were.

Koviloor Digital Library

LVII

IN THE GLORIOUS DAWN.

Following upon the cremation of the Master's body, the monk-disciples had gathered the ashes together and placed them in a copper receptacle in the room the Master had occupied during his last illness. Here they worshipped and here they prayed. Some of the householder disciples, however, soon questioned the right of the monks to have this priceless possession of the Master's relics. To the Master's devotees these constituted the most sacred treasure in the world. The monks at first refused to listen to the householders and a dispute arose, characterised by much intensity of feeling and exchange of words. The householders who demanded the relics insisted, saying, "You are Sannyâsins! Who knows where you will be to-morrow! You have not even a permanent roof over your heads! How can you take càre of the Lord's rèlics!" Thus they presented their side of the matter proposing to lay the relics in a garden belonging to one of them and raise a temple over them. Whilst the monks were still at Cossipur, no great difference of feeling was shown. At Baranagore, these householders headed by Rama Babu redoubled their efforts to secure the precious relics and came in a body to take possession of them. The monks Soshi and Niranjan had constituted themselves the guardians and protectors of the Master's relics and they were giants, one in resolution and the other in appearance. These two were ready to stand their ground at any cost. In this dilemma Norendra appealed to the monks and taking them aside said, "Brothers! Let us be *men*! Let us mould our lives according to our Master's teaching, which was man-making! Let them have the ashes! If we cannot prove our devotion to the Master by following his precepts and principles, embracing the Sannyâsin life, what will it matter how much we worship the relics! Let it not be said that the disciples

Kovilpur Digital Library

of Sri Ramakrishna fought over his ashes! If we are true to his ideals, if we make ourselves the living examples of our Master's teachings, the whole world will fall at our feet!" What more was to be done! The Leader had spoken irresistible words of wisdom. The monks quietly accepted his decision, seeing the fitness of it. Accordingly a day was fixed, and Soshi, carrying the ashes of the Master on his head, went with other disciples to the Kanchurgachi garden of Ramchandra Dutta, where it had been arranged that the Master's relics should permanently repose beneath an altar, and a temple be erected over them. Henceforth this garden became known as the Yogodyân, or garden of Yoga, and every year an anniversary celebration is held here in honour of Sri Ramakrishna. Worship and ceremonies were performed with due solemnity, and Soshi's eyes were filled with tears as he saw the ground beaten down over the Master's ashes. He said later on, "It seemed as if they were hammering and crushing the very heart out of us!"

When they had returned to the monastery, both Soshi and Niranjan coming to the Leader said, "Noren, we have given the ashes!—but," and here they pointed to another receptacle and added, "but here is another portion of the relics. We simply could not give all of them away. It would have killed us!" The Leader looked tenderly upon them and said, "Well! Let the Lord's Will be done!" And when the householders heard this they smiled also, saying, "Let the *Thâkur's* Will be done!" And so the ashes reposed in a shrine in the best room of the monastery and the Presence of the Master was daily worshipped with incense and lights and with flowers and offerings. So the dispute was ended; and the strained feeling between the monks and the householders finally subsided in the course of time, and all the were united in common love to the Master. Indeed, whilst Ramchandra Dutta himself lay ill unto death several times, the Math Brothers went to serve him. And the Swami Vivekananda after his return from the West, going to visit him on one of these occasions, showed his great

Kovilpor Digital Library

respect for this devoted householder disciple of the Master, by taking the shoes of the man and placing them at his feet for use, as an act of loving service and sweet humility !

When the monks who lived at Cossipur gave up the dwelling-place after the Master's departure, they took with them to Baranagore the Master's bedding, clothes, the furniture of his room and the various utensils which had been used in serving him, and preserved them as invaluable treasures cherishing them with religious devotion. Often, often the monks would say, " These are great treasures, but even greater than the greatest treasure, even greater than the Master's relics is His Spirit !" And they would all say to Norendra, " Do you not remember how He told you that wheresoever you would take him, there He would remain with you !" And a smile was seen on the Leader's face ; and it was now evident to all the monks how Norendra could have brought himself to give over to the householder disciples the Master's relics, for he had felt that the Master was *always* with them, and remembered his memorable words, "Wheresoever *you* choose to put me there I shall gladly abide."

The monastery was at Baranagore from the year 1886 to 1892. From 1892 to 1897 it was at Alumbazar in the neighbourhood of Dakshineswar. Thence it was removed to the Garden-house of Nilambar Mukherjee on the banks of the Ganges, exactly across the river from the suburb of Baranagore. Since then it has been established permanently a little way up on the Ganges side,—which the Master loved so much,—in Belur, in the beautiful and spacious premises secured by the Swami Vivekananda for his fellow-monks as their own abode, and as the final resting-place of the Master's relics.

Henceforth one witnesses the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna assimilating his teachings and unconsciously preparing the way for the propaganda of his message to the world, in the monastery at Baranagore. They grouped themselves about Norendra in a spiritual relationship, supporting him passively

Koviloor Digital Library

by the conservation of the spiritual energy which they developed and he rising to heights of apostolic vision. Simple and endowed with the nature of children, the monks had the fire of spirituality and the innocence and joyousness of a free soul. During the three years until he became the *Parivrâjaka* or itinerant monk, with the exception of short travels here and there, Norendra was always in their midst, guiding them and he himself being in one sense guided by them. It was as though he was the trunk and they so many spreading branches—all growing into that Banyan Tree which, as Sri Ramakrishna had promised, would become through the personality of Norendra a shelter for many, many souls. Aye, in the fulness of time, it was to spread itself all over the earth including peoples in far distant lands, for the Master had said, "My Mother shows me that many of my disciples shall be gathered into the Fold, who speak a different language than I know and who are far, far away." It was not strange, therefore, that during the years to come great souls in India and elsewhere should hear of the Man of Dakshineswar in startling and undreamed of ways. The ground from which sprang this human *Panchavati*, if it may be so called, was that of Dakshineswar, the seeds were the Gospel Words of Sri Ramakrishna, the trunk was Norendra and the monks were the growing branches. Its roots were in Eternity and it was nourished constantly by the Waters of the Divine Life. And each monk was necessary for the whole. As one sees the story unfold, Norendra and all the monks become as Rays, varying only in the degree of luminousity and intensity, of that Mighty Effulgence which *is* the Master, and in the deepest mystical sense, which is—The Mother, the Brahmamayee.

And what a life they led ! Unwilling to beg for anything except what voluntarily came, they lived on what chance brought ; and they vied with each other in doing the works of the household, even the menial ones, in which their leader himself joined. Talks would continue, on the way to fetch the water, or in course of sweeping, cooking, and cleansing the utensils. Many were the days when there was nothing

Koviloor Digital Library

to eat or to cook, but the conversations on spirituality went on for whole days and nights without a thought for the body. Their sole clothing was the *kaupin* and *gerrua* rags. A mat and a *chudder* on the floor sufficed for their bed. A few pictures of the saints and of the Gods and Goddesses, the *Japamâlâ* or beads, and the *Tânpurâ* hung from the walls. Their whole library consisted of sacred books in Sanskrit, wrapped in *Gerrua*, as well as those in Bengali and English, about a hundred in all, heaped up in an orderly manner upon an ordinary wooden bedstead in one corner,—and these were gifts of the devotees. Only one piece of cloth and a *chudder* that was worn about the shoulders as an upper garment, were all that the monks had between them. These hung as common property upon a line and whosoever chose to leave the premises of the monastery was welcome to use them wherewith to clothe himself respectably.

Surendra Nath Mittra or Suresh Babu as he was called by the community, was the ministering angel of the monastery, in looking after the bodily needs of the monks. The small sum which he at first gave, he soon found insufficient to meet their wants. His large heart said, "I must see to it that they are never in want! They are the children of my Lord and are my dear brothers!" So, calling one named Gopal to him he said, "Will you enter my service? I will meet all the necessary expenses of your family. All that you need do is to live in the monastery to help in the household duties, and come to me every day or so to give news of the Brothers; and let there be this understanding between you and me that whensoever you find that the Brothers are in need, you must tell me of it!" Gopal who had known Sri Ramakrishna and who had made Norendra the idol of his heart, and who could not join the monastery because he had to support his widowed mother and two little brothers, readily consented to this proposal. His eyes surveyed everything, and whenever things were going too far and the monks had had no food for many hours, he would go to Suresh Babu saying, "They have had nothing

Kovilpoor Digital Library

to eat this day." Thereupon Suresh Babu deeply moved would exclaim, "Here, go to the bazaar! Get whatever is required. But do not say that I sent it. They may feel that they are giving me too much trouble!" And handing over to Gopal the necessary money, he would be happy in his heart over the surprise of the monks, for he knew they would wonder where the blessings came from. But Gopal who was shrewd enough would answer their eager queries by merely saying, "O these came from someone. He pressed me very hard to bring these to you, and so I could not refuse!" And the monks would marvel at the manner in which the Master cared for them.

One of the householder disciples of the Master, describing the attitude of Suresh Babu to the monks, has written thus in an apostrophising style: "Blessed be Surendra! It is you who laid the first brick of the structure of this Math and showed, by making it possible for the Brothers to gather together, the embodied forms of the Renunciation of Lust and Gold, the *Mulamantram* of the Master. You made it possible to manifest the glories of Hinduism through these pure-souled Brothers of lifelong *Brahmacharya* and *Vairagyam*. Who will pay off your debt! The Brothers always thought dearly of you, looking forward to your coming and your genial company. To-day all the money left was spent in paying off the rent; there was nothing left to buy food with. Then you came and enquired and arranged about it!"

Sometimes there were visitors of quite a different nature, however. These were the guardians of the young monks, who came insistently to induce them to return to the worldly life. They would come, imploring, hoping against hope, weeping, threatening, but to no purpose, for the monks were inexorable. Everything was to be renounced. No, not even one's own mother should stand in the way to the realisation of God. These men were filled with the Christ-spirit, and they knew only their longing for God, and that peace was only to be realised in this world of strife when the Object of their hearts was attained. They flatly refused

Koviloor Digital Library

to recognise their guardians, as is the custom amongst monks in all ages and in all climes. They would see their parents through their love for God, but not in and through the worldly life. They would see their mother in every woman, and God as all-pervading in each and every soul. Each was the other's brother. The guardians would persist, saying within the hearing of the Leader, "This Noren is the root of all this evil. The boys had returned home and renewed their studies when he came and upset all their plans." And the monks and the Leader would smile sweetly and make every effort to win them over to the vision of the justice and consistency of the monastic life and would say, "We have given up the householder's life. To return is impossible." And Soshi pressed by his father to return home would say, full of intense *Vairagyam*, "To one who has renounced, the world is even as a tiger's den!" In the vista of from ten to twenty-five years those who attempted to persuade the young monks to return have seen that it was right that the monks had chosen the vocation to which Sri Ramakrishna had summoned them.

But those days were strenuous days, and when the trouble was over, all might repair to the Dânâs' room, as the main room was called, and midst music and sweet song drive off all the cares and thoughts of worldly life. And Norendra's voice was the delight of the monks. And it was true even as Sri Ramakrishna had said several years ago, "As the snake remains spell-bound with its hood up on hearing the sweet music of the flutes, so when Norendra sings, He who is in the heart, the *Antaryâmin*, also hears it spell-bound!" And from music or from the heights of meditation, the monks would often come to the discussion of *Kâmini-Kânchana*, and their hearts would burn with fierce spiritual joy and they would hate the worldly life and repeat the vows of Sannyâs over and over again, and the prayer would be, O Lord,

"From the Unreal lead us to the Real,
From Darkness lead us unto Light!"

Koviloor Digital Library

Other hours would be consumed in the study of philosophy; and Kant and Mill, Hegel and Spencer and even the atheists and materialists would become subjects of discussion to the devotees; Norendra would invariably take up the opponent's position, and with his invincible logic smash up all his *Gurubhais'* arguments, and again in the end, taking up their standpoint would show the difficiencies or fallacies of his previous line of argument. The conversation would be sure to end in some saying of Sri Ramakrishna, reconciling all the conflicting doctrines. Then the chant of the Guru Gitâ, or perhaps a song of Sri Sankara, *e. g.*, the Mohamudgar,—The Hammer of Delusion—would be sung, or songs on Sri Krishna, or those on the Mother by Ram Prasad.

This was the Baranagore monastery, and such is the picture of those glorious days!

Koviloor Digital Library

LVIII

THE FORMING OF THE MONASTIC ORDER.

The founding of a monastic order is always an historic event, for however small the beginning it is bound to exercise a vital influence upon contemporary life and thought, and therefore upon posterity as well. This is particularly true when it incorporates new ideals in the religious and monastic vision of a nation. The Ramakrishna Order of Monks has become to-day an historic institution, in as much as it has embodied a new vision of the Indian outlook as a whole, and a new relationship between Hindu Society and Hindu monasticism, in particular. It fulfills the dual mission of "*Siva* and *Seva*"; or to put in another way, to the immemorial Hindu ideals of the life of meditation and pure and retiring monasticism, it has added the ideals of service and works of mercy; it also combines within it the dual ideal of personal freedom in the monastic career for the individual monk—an aeon old phenomenon in Sannyâs as it has been cherished by the itinerant Sadhu—with the principles of compact monastic brotherhood and organisation as witnessed in the Western world. Thus from several important points of view the Order of Ramakrishna is one of the most unique institutions in the growth of Hinduism, and its history is fascinating both in a religious and a social sense. As in all other instances when religious orders were introduced, the religious preceded the social form; and thus it is treated chronologically in the life of the Swami Vivekananda, whose powerful personality really shaped this new order in Hinduism, conceived by Sri Ramakrishna.

After they had all assembled at Baranagore, the Brothers received an invitation from the mother of the monk Premananda to go on a short visit to his native village; this invitation coming from a Bhakta of Sri Ramakrishna was

Koviloor Digital Library

gladly taken advantage of. The Baranagore monastery was practically empty on that late day in the month of December when the monks travelled as cheaply as possible to the distant village of Antpur, by rail and bullock cart. At this place they were most cordially received and entertained by the family and the villagers. Here the light of their combined spiritual fire blazed up into a contagious mass. Here they made themselves passive to all those sublimated religious feelings and moods of exaltation, which are preliminary steps towards some event rich and vibrant with spiritual meaning and purpose. But it was all unconscious to them at the time, that a few days hence their lives would be changed by the formation of a compact spiritual body. However, somehow every one of them felt a glowing increase of the spiritual consciousness and a sense of beatitude and nearness to the Master, realised only in rare instances before.

And Norendra constantly incited them to the pitch of religious enthusiasm. It seemed as if the Spirit of the Master was speaking and working *through* him. Norendra was intensely possessed by the living vision of the Sannyâsin life, and would cry out, "Jaya Ramakrishna! Let Man-Making be the goal of our life. Let us make this our only *sadhana*! Away with vain learning! What matter fine words or fine argumentations! Realisation of God is the one thing! That is what Sri Ramakrishna's life represented! We must become filled with that spirit! We must attain the True Manhood and manifest our Real Nature! We must realise God!" These words became the motto of this ecstatic group of monks. They thought the same thoughts, they breathed the same ideas, they were fired with a sameness of purpose, and a certain awareness of unity descended upon them. They felt, each for the other, that they were all inseparably connected by some wonderful spiritual power. Each realised that the other was his brother. And during their several days' stay at the village of Antpur they seemed to grow into one body, one mind and one soul. The days

Koviloor Digital Library

passed in meditation, song and *sankirtana* and therewould be dancing in the name of the Lord, led by Norendra. And the simple village-people considered themselves blessed by the advent of these monks and Bhaktas. There was always a stimulating exchange of thought between the monks. Sometimes it would be the Brother Kali who would converse with Norendra on the Vedanta philosophy, and both would become a seething tempest of its glorious ideas. And Norendra would speak of a Great Power behind the universe, and insist that the true "I," the true Nature of man, was beyond thought and form and that the whole purpose of evolution was to manifest the Divinity *already* in Man. But in the days at Antpur there was more than *thinking* going on. There was at work a silent force of consolidation.

The Master was always the topic of conversation. Sri Ramakrishna seemed to be within their hearts. His name was always on their lips and in their thought. Several days had gone by in this way, the monks having the freedom of a large old house and dwelling with those who were devotees of their Master. Here they were free from the turmoil of life in the metropolis. Here all was peace. The simple village life of Antpur, with its quietude and beauty, made it an ideal place for meditation. And the monks often meditated upon various ideals until the strength and insight of the Life Everlasting came upon them. But, strange to say, upon all alike there seemed to descend a great spirit which made their hearts desire to renew the vows of the Sannyâsin life, each in the presence of the others. To some this spirit manifested itself during the intense conversations with the Leader, to others, again, during the tense moments of the meditative state. And upon the inner hearing of their souls the Voice of the Buddha Bodhisattva seemed to fall, calling them to an intensification of the monastic spirit, both for the salvation of themselves and for the good of the world. And each saw in his brother-monk a world of spiritual force and between them an intenser love took birth, so that each looked upon the others as the dearest ones of his life. And this was bound to

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

be, for now that the Master had departed, the Spirit which was his was destined to be perpetuated, not singly or isolatedly as in the ordinary case of Guru and Shishya, but organised in a definite form. His *gurubhais* came to recognise Norendra as their leader in a stronger sense than ever before. He was the head and they the body, as it were. Accordingly, in these days they saw in him a wonderful manifestation of soul-power, and instinctively *looked up* to him in all matters of the spirit, even as they had done to Sri Ramakrishna in former days. They were magnetised by his personality and unconsciously made themselves subordinate to his thought.

As to Norendra himself the words of his Master concerning his brother-monks, when he had made him the Leader, kept ringing in his ears, and he remembered how Sri Ramakrishna had spoken of several of them as *Ishvarakotis*, thus spiritualising and deifying his conception of their personalities and giving a dignity to his relationship with them. Sri Ramakrishna had said of these that they were High Officers of the World-Incarnations and are born with them to fulfil a certain purpose; and Norendra believed this because the Word of his Master had proved infallible in all the cases that he had tested. He knew too that the Master had spoken of him even in a more exalted way, having referred to him as the Leader of those in the Circle of Office-bearers of the Avataras. Thus he felt at one and the same time the pressure of an overwhelming humility and responsibility. Over him, moreover, came the sweeping storm-winds of the Highest Resolve. For the good of the world he would ordain his life, keeping inexorably to the two great vows of the Sannyâsin life—chastity and poverty. All his *tapasya* and realisation, he decided, should be given to the world. In the innermost silence of his soul his whole nature spoke out, "He has said that I am FREE. Then let me give even my FREEDOM in the cause of his Gospel." And he remembered the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, and in the peace of the village of Antpur the Leader of this group of monks abandoned himself mentally to the service of the world, saying with bated breath and with

Koviloor Digital Library

all the power of his spirit, "Om Sri Ramakrishnarpanamastu!" In a climax of personal resignation. And he would call to the Mother, praying that She might make him fit and capable, and in response the flood-tides of his soul were let loose and he *knew* his power. Here at Antpur, in the still hours, great things were transpiring in subtle ways, knitting the Brothers together in close bonds, and in the exalted vision of life. Without their conscious knowledge all this occurred, but it found expression one evening before a huge *dhuni* in the compound of the house which they had made holy with their prayers and with their joy.

It was late in the evening when the monks gathered together before the fire. Huge logs of wood were brought by them and ignited; and soon a raging flame burned upwards, making the darkness beautiful by contrast. And overhead was the canopy of the Indian night, and all around was the ineffable peace of the rural stillness. The meditation began, continuing for a long time. Then a break was made and the Leader filled the Silence with the Story of the Lord Jesus. From the very beginning, from the Wondrous Mystery of Birth it commenced. The monks were raised into beatitude with the Virgin Mary when the Saviour's Coming was announced to Her, and with Her they sang in spirit the *Magnificat*. The story was told according to the four Gospels. The monks lived with Jesus during the days of His Childhood; they were with Him in the Flight into Egypt. They were with Him in the Temple, surrounded by the Jewish Pandits hearing and answering their questions. They were with Him at the time when He gathered His first disciples, and they adored Him even as they adored their own Master. The many points of similarity in thought and action as well as the relationship with the disciples, between Christ and Ramakrishna, forcibly brought to their minds the old days of ecstasy with their Master. The words of Christ the Redeemer rang upon their ears as familiar sayings. They wondered at His miracles and were lost with Him in the worlds of meditation. They saw

Koviloor Digital Library

His Triumph and Arrest, His Agony and Torture, His being mocked by a whole nation and being nailed to the Cross. They saw Him die while the earth was covered with darkness and a terrible earthquake shook the foundations of the city of Jerusalem and the Veil of the Temple was rent in twain. They were the consolers of Mary the Mother in the hours of Her great affliction; and with Mary Magdalene and with the disciples they saw the Resurrected Christ. They were present when the Arisen Christ spoke and ate with the wonder-stricken disciples; they were present when in full view of all He ascended into Heaven. And through the eloquence of Norendra they were admitted into that grand apostolic world where Paul preached the Gospel of the Arisen Christ and spread Christianity far and wide. The Pentecostal Fire of the Early Christians devoured their souls, and in the peace of the village of Antpur the Names of Christ and Ramakrishna resounded on the midnight air.

And from this height of ecstasy Norendra addressed the monks charging them to become *themselves* Christs, to aid in the Redemption of the World. They were to realise God and deny themselves even as the Lord Jesus had done. And standing there before the *dhuni*, with the flames lighting up their countenances and with the crackling wood alone disturbing the Silence of their thought, they took the Vows of Eternal Sannyâs before God and one another. The very air seemed to vibrate with their ecstatic fervour. And all through the night the Indian Ages kept the watch. And the watch-word of the night and of their hearts were, "Realisation throurgh Renunciation!"

Strangest of all when the monks had reached the highest flights of soul they suddenly remembered,—It was Christmas Eve!

Before returning to the monastery at Baranagore they all went on pilgrimage to the famous Temple of Tarakeswar Shiva where they offered worship to the Lord of monks.

Koviloor Digital Library

LIX

THE LIFE OF TAPASYA AT BARANAGORE.

That was life, indeed, at Baranagore. It was ecstasy overreaching ecstasy. Oftentimes *Sankirtana* would begin in the morning and go on till the evening, every one forgetting all thought of food and rest. In their burning desire for God-vision some one or other would think, as did Norendra, of giving up the body in *Prayopaveshana*, that is, starving oneself to death without rising from the meditation-seat if the Goal was not reached.

There is no better description of the days at Baranagore than that which comes from the lips of the Leader himself. In the days when he was the President of the Belur Math, after the greatest triumphs of his career, a disciple asked him, "Maharaj, how did you maintain yourselves at that time?" The Swami's mind travelled back across the years. He seemed suddenly to have been transported from Belur to Baranagore and his whole face took on a strange expression, half-sad, half-glorious, as old memories flitted across his mind. Of a sudden he turned upon the disciple with a startling reply, "What a silly question! We are Sannyâsins, don't you see? We never thought of the morrow. We used to live on what little came by begging. To-day Suresh Babu is not with us, and Balaram Babu has also passed away. Had these two been alive they would have danced with joy at the sight of this Math!"—and the Swami's eyes surveyed the spacious grounds with the luminous satisfaction of a life's work accomplished. Continuing, he remarked, "You have heard of Suresh Babu's name, I dare say! Know him to be the source of this Math. It was he who helped to found the Baranagore Math. O it was Suresh Mittra who at that time was most anxious to meet our needs! Who can equal him in piety and faith, my boy?" And following up the mood of musing the Swami said, "There were days.

Kovilloor Digital Library

at the Baranagore Math when we were so much in want that we had nothing to eat. If the rice was procured by begging, there was no salt. Or some days, we had only rice and salt, but nobody would mind that. Leaves of the Bimba creeper boiled, salt and rice—this went on for months! Come what may, we were indifferent. We were being carried on by a strong tide of religious practices and meditation. O the days that we passed! Demons even would have run away at the sight of such austerities, what to speak of men! Ask Rakhal, Soshi and others about this and you will know. The more circumstances are against you, the more will your inner power become manifest. Do you understand?" Of course, the Swami said all this speaking only to his disciple in order to infuse in him a longing to lead a similar life of devotion and renunciation; otherwise he was intensely reticent about these subjects.

The Swami Sadananda, the first disciple of the Leader, speaking in later times of these days as they were lived by his Guru, said, "During these years he, the Master, would work twenty-four hours at a time. He was lunatic-like, he was so busy!" Early in the morning, whilst it was still dark, he would rise and call the others, singing, "Awake! Arise, all ye who would drink of the divine nectar!". And long after the midnight hours he and the other monks would still be sitting on the roof of the monastery building, singing and singing the canticles of praise. The neighbourhood was alarmed and expostulated, but that made no difference. And the musical voice of Norendra would lead the chanting of the names of "Sita Rama" or of "Radha-Krishna."

"Those were hot days," said the Monk Sadananda. "There was no minute for rest. Outsiders came and went. Pandits argued and discussed. But he, the Swami, was never for one moment idle, never dull." Indeed, he was always on the alert, speaking both spiritually and intellectually. For days together he would address the monks on social topics, inspiring them with the broad vision of the foundations of Indian society and culture. He would take them through the ages of the whole world's history. Now perhaps he would give

Kovilpur Digital Library

them the spirit of "Gibbon's Rome", or that of "Carlyle's French Revolution," or he would make luminous for them the whole contents of Indian history; or led by his inspiration the monks would set to the work of nation-building, with the Emperor Akbar on the broad basis of universal principles, or be on the battle-field of the Mahabharata War. Throughout he would point out to them the formation and the greatness of the national life from the spiritual point of view, and they would see in each great Indian the preserver of the Indian culture. So much was the Swami himself impressed with the oneness and with the import of its civilisation that, many times on meeting a Mohammedan, he would salute him with the greatest respcet, for he would see in him the representative of Asiatic civilisation. This became intensified with him on his return from the West when he perceived the inestimable distinctions between the Orient and the Occident.

Many Pandits and Scholars came and held discourse with the monks, and the Swami would upset their learned propositions and show them that the roots of Sanskritic learning lay in *the culture of the people* and that the basis of India's incomparable philosophies was in *the life of the people.* He showed them that, in India, the accumulated learning of the ages, divorced from the concrete human value of the racial experience of the masses, was meaninglessly abstract. And the monks of Ramakrishna fathomed the intellectual abysses of their Leader's thought, and they knew in what direction the soul of things was bound in matters of nation-shaping. Long before the famous achievements at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, long before he was publicly recognised, the Swami Vivekananda was to his *gurubhais* the Incarnate Intelligence of Hinduism. Christian missionaries came and argued with the monks in the Baranagore Math and Norendra would vanquish all their violent reasoning with a brilliance of logic all his own; then again, when they acknowledged their defeat, he would turn and with the love of his whole heart expound to them the wonders of the Christian Gospels.

Koviloor Digital Library

Often the Baranagore Math became, as it were, a debating society with Norendra as the President and chief speaker, whilst the other monks, ranking themselves against him, defended the opposite views. Various were the topics discussed,—religion, theology, history, sociology, literature, arts, sciences, comparative religion, philosophy and even atheism. If the talk was on whether God existed or not, the Leader would prove with all vehemence of logic and reason that God was a myth. And again he would prove the very reverse, showing that God was the only Reality in the world. Sometimes he would take up Sankaracharya's philosophy and doctrines and would cut up root and branch all his theories, exposing their fallacies. Then again he would prove by opposite line of arguments that Sankara was the only true philosopher whose doctrines were unassailable. All the philosophic of schools Hindusthan were brought into these discussions in all their complex details. The Sânkhya, Yoga, Nyâya, Vaishesika, Mimânsâ and Vedânta—each in its turn was pitched against the other, and their points of agreement and contrast were brought out and discussed with rigorous analytical acumen. Again, the Vedanta was compared with and strengthened against Buddhistic philosophy and vice versa. The rise of various religious ideas and sects in India were commented upon, and Vaishnavism was compared with Shaivaism. Devi-worship would be revealed in all its aspects and then, perhaps, the discussions would go into the utmost historic distance and the Vedic Gods would be weighed carefully with the ideals of the Tantras and Puranas.

And then Norendra would strike out into most original paths, illustrating the historical import of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings upon the present generation of Hindus who were educated in Western lines of thought, and would show how his life was destined to alter their minds and the entire character of their theological outlook, thus bringing them back from drifting in an ever-widening radical divergence from Hinduism into the understanding of and concurrence with the Hindu ideals of worship and with the contents of

Koviloor Digital Library

the Upanishads. He would also say to them, "The time will come when you will see what part Ramakrishna has played in the re-Hinduisation of Hinduism and the consolidation, into a compact form, of its essential elements."

To the monks, even at this time, the Swami was "a genius of the highest order," and each day revealed to them more and more in the way of fulfilment of the prophecies of the Master concerning him. As one monk writes, "The same fire and eloquence, the same force of personality, which revealed themselves for the first time to the world in Chicago, were present even in those days, when he was training up his fellow-Sannyâsins for future work, perhaps even without their knowledge. Through loving discipline, he infused into them the fire and a wider knowledge of the Mission that was before them, the Mission which was entrusted by the Master into his charge for fruition and dissemination. Most of the sublime ideas which he gave to the world, in the time of his fame, were not new, except in modes of expression, to his brother-monks, for they had heard them in these Baranagore days, or even earlier at the Garden-house at Cossipur."

Most of all, the Leader initiated his fellow-monks into the living realities of Hinduism, making them *conscious* of the *values* of its thought and spirit. In this manner he made them capable of seeing the Mother-Church from the *intellectual* side and made them all *Defenders of the Faith*, as well, against ruthless and ignorant criticism. He made them master the Upanishads, the Yoga Vâshishtha, the Puranas and the other Shastras, until they knew *why* the Rishis were so exclusive to those who were outside the pale of Hinduism; but *their* Mission was to *Brâhmanise* them and *Brâhmanise* the Sudras. Even in these early days, one witnesses herein the twofold Gospel of Vivekananda, that of giving the learning and spirit of the Brâhmanas to those outside the fold of Hinduism, thus propagating it as a World-Religion, and that of conveying the Brâhmanical culture to the Indian millions themselves, thus reshaping and solidifying and strengthening the diverse races of Hindusthan into a *Nation*. Even in these

Koviloor Digital Library

early days the Leader would charge them to go to the villages of *Chandalas* and preach to them.

The monks were interested, also, in other things. As the Sister Nivedita has written, "I know of one disciple, who in the early days of the Order was so filled with the impulse of reverence for service that he nursed the sores of the lepers to bring them ease. The nursing of the sick and the feeding of the poor have, indeed, from the first, been natural activities of the Children of Ramakrishna, and after Swamiji's return from the West, these things took on a larger aspect." Though they could hardly feed themselves, the monks fed the needy and those who came as guests, often denying themselves for the sake of service to others. They were filled with the ideal of self-obliteration and served each other in the spirit of true brotherhood and also those who came under the sphere of their influence, either in religion or in works of mercy.

And they observed all the religious festivals, and it is interesting to see how they celebrated the first *Shiva Ratri*, the Night of Shiva, at the Baranagore Math. Such was their devotion that the whole day they fasted and the whole night long they prayed and worshipped; and on the morning the Brothers sang Norendra's newly-composed song to Shiva which begins, "*Tathaiya, Tathaiya*, dances Bhola", and which continues and ends in rhapsodical language, presenting a realistic vision of the Luminous Personality of the Lord. And through the night at stated intervals during the ritual of worship,—their bodies covered with ashes—the monks would dance, clapping their hands, while their voices sounded in wild ecstasy and joy the words, "Hara! Hara! Vyom! Vyom!" which means "The destroyer of Illusion! The Destroyer of Bondage! The Infinite Void! The Infinite Void" in glorious refrain. And the intervals during worship were enlivened by philosophical debates, and Norendra would shine as the *Teacher*. And in the early hours of the morning the Homa Sacrifice was performed and oblations offered in the Names of all the Gods and Goddesses and all the *Avataras* of the Hindus as well as of other nations, and all their offerings finally blended into a grand worship

Koviloor Digital Library

of Sri Ramakrishna. And all through the night one heard the calling out of, "Hara! Hara! Mahadev!" Or, it would be "Shiva Guru! Shiva Guru! Shiva Guru!" in a classic and continuous chant.

One recalls the *Shiva-ratri* celebration of the preceding year, in March 1886, at the Cossipur Garden-house, when Norendra in the interval of his meditation transmitted the Advaita consciousness to one of his *gurubhais* by a mere touch.

Of this Spirit were the days of the Baranagore Math.

Koviloor Digital Library

LX

THE RHAPSODIES OF INSIGHT.

All the extensive learning which the Leader had gained in the long process of his personal enlightenment went towards the intellectual development of his *gurubhais*. In giving up their university examinations and renouncing their degrees, the monks had in reality lost nothing—indeed, they were admitted into a world of richer intellectual life, for their leader was in himself an encyclopædia. He had ploughed his way through innumerable fields of thought. He had unearthed mines of learning and was possessed of their riches. He had mastered books of both Western and Eastern knowledge, in the departments of science, philosophy and religion, and now he was giving forth in daily conversation all the knowledge he had acquired. It was all an unconscious process. It was not as if the Leader set himself up in this respect on the pedestal of a teacher. The monks would sit around him and listen, and he would speak on for hours, sometimes continuing the same subject for days upon days. He was simply expressing himself. It was as if he were holding converse with his own genius, himself raising and solving the difficulties and simplifying the intricacies of his own mind, and the enthusiastic audience of monks was as if the stimulating force. But everything, every word, every thought, every gesture, every desire of the mind, every illumination of the heart was made subordinate to the spiritual purposes. The topics of intellectual exchange were manifold and all-inclusive. Now it might be the secular, then the sacred; now it might be philosophy, now sociology, now science, now the fine arts, now the Humanities, now history, now asceticism. Old and new worlds of thought intermingled until the thought-systems of Sankaracharya and Kant were conterminous realities in the minds of the monks; and so on and on.

In the morning after meditation the exchange of thought

Kovilpur Digital Library

would commence. On and on it would continue, the conversation deepening in subject and intensity with Norendra as the chief speaker and the rest as eager listeners punctuating his discourse with happy and luminous remarks. Sometimes the whole monastery would be empty save that room which was known as the Kâli Tapasvi's room, where he who became the Swami Abhedananda and a Sanskrit scholar plunged himself heart and soul into the study of that language and its culture, behind locked doors so as not to be disturbed. And there for hours upon hours, sometimes from early daylight to the dead of night he would lose himself in work. Mostly of course, the monks assembled for their conversations and songs in the Dânâs' room, or the room for Shiva's Demons, as it was lovingly called. Sometimes they would walk about, holding their discourse in Peripatetic style, while Norendra taught. Or perhaps they would be seated upon the ground in the shade of the trees and would spend hours in a tense state of mind. And during the remarks of the Leader, frequently their voices would rend the air with, "Jay Guru Mahârâjki Jaya! Jay Mahâmâki Jaya!" whenever their minds broke out into intellectual rapture and beatitude. Or at times the Leader would seek one or other out in his solitude, and enquiring the contents of his thought or study, would enter into illuminating talk or explain the intricate portion of a certain text of the Scriptures, other Brothers joining them one by one.

For most days this was the case. As an instance, there was the time when they gave themselves over to the study of Buddhism under the spell of Norendra's inspiration. They devoured the Lalita Vistara, until their souls leaving the present wandered into the distant and historic past. They walked with the Lord from Buddha Gaya to Rajgir or sojourned with Him in the Deer Park, the Sarnath of to day. They were with Him in those august moments when He became the Tathâgatha under the Bo-Tree of Illumination. They felt His renunciation; they witnessed His passing. And they wept with Ananda and the disciples at the burning pyre and with the Mallas of Kusinagara they preserved His

Digitized by

relics, and prayed at the Shrine of the Lord. They held discourse with Nagasena and the Bactrian King Melinda upon the complex grandeurs of the Buddhist philosophy, and they saw the whole rise of the Buddhist epochs. They were of the millions of yellow-robed *bhikshus* with whom they begged and meditated to realise the Truth. They helped the devoted Sramanas to hew out the rock-cave monasteries of Karli and Kenheri and Elephanta and Ajanta, and they worshipped with the Sramanas in the grand temple of Kailas at Ellora. They were inmates of the Vihara at Sarnath and read the rock edicts of the Emperor Asoka. They were monks of the University of Nalanda and welcomed the famous Chinese travellers, Hiouen Tsang and Fa Hien. From Ceylon to China and Japan and even to Egypt and to Rome they travelled with the Buddhist monks, influencing the rise, theological growth and philosophy of Christianity and reshaping the religious and philosophical outlookin China and Japan. The Leader made the Story of Buddha vibrant to their souls. They read the then newly-published book of the Mahâyana school. They became adepts in the Hinayana school also. They steeped their thought likewise in the then newly-published *Prajnâpâramitâ*, and the desire to become *Arhats* stole upon them. For days and days this went on until the followers of Ramakrishna were as so many yellow-robed Sramanas, crying out, "Om Namo Bhagavate Buddhâya !"

And then the balances of thought would swing in other measurements. The Leader would *shake* them out of Buddhism, and the subject for days would be the historical import of the Hindu Incarnations and Bhaktas and Acharyas. Rama, Krishna, Sankara, Ramanuja, Kabir; Tulsidas, Ramdas, Chaitanya, Ram Prasad, Guru Nanak, and the *Leelas* of the Lord would pass through the minds of the monks in kaleidoscopic succession, and they would see the historic blending of them all into the gradual conformation of the glory of Bhâratavarsha and the consolidation of the Sanâtana Dharma. They were made aware, through Noren's

Kovilpur Digital Library

illuminating methods of treatment, of the tendency to unification of which Hinduism had always been possessed and which has been exemplified in the vision of "Hari-Hara" or the oneness of Nârâyana and Mahâdeva. And he pointed out to them the underlying purpose which led the genius of Sankara to encourage Shaivaism and preach the Advaita Vedanta whilst still substantiating æon-old Hindu traditions and composing glowing rhapsodies to the Mother as well as to Vishnu. He introduced them into the vision of the ancient Aryan Rishis, whose lives and thought were the fulfilment,and not the denial, of all the parts and phases of the Dharma,until they would be maddened with enthusiasm. But Hinduism was not to be their *limitation* ; they must acquire the *universal* per spective. They must know the Dharma of those whom orthodoxy called "Mlechchhas", and so crossing the Kalapani of bigotry, they became aware of the greatness of the Mlechchhas.

Thus they would wander to Bethlehem, through the imaginative expansion of their leader's mind, crossing time and geographical distances and reach the hills of Judæa. And they would see the Star of the East, the Birth of the Saviour,and to them the Angels would announce, as to the simple shepherds, in a "Gloria in Excelsis" the Coming of the Lord Jesus as a Babe. And they would prostrate themselves with the shepherds and the Wise Men of the East, offering with them the gold and frankincense and myrrh of their hearts unto Him. They would see Him teaching in the Temple, performing His First Miracle, living with Him in the Silence into which He often retired. They would associate with Peter and James and John, and hear Jesus teach and preach, and witness the moment when He made Peter the rock on which to build His church. And here they would pause, reflecting how similar was the case with their own Lord and the chief disciple who was now speaking unto them. Then they would be present in spirit at the Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, the Lord's Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging and Crowning with Thorns, the Crucifixion,—and the Resurrection. Often Baranagore became, as it were, a Heavenly

Koviloor Digital Library

Jerusalem and Christ would be as though present amongst them. And they would see the human side of the New Testament, almost recognising the figures as they moved and spoke with the Lord in those ancient days.

So great was the Swami's veneration for Jesus that, when once in his later days, he was asked to bless the picture of the Sistine Madonna which some one had brought to him for that purpose, he touched the Feet of the Child instead. And on another occasion when a Western lady-disciple questioned him about his believing in the personal worship of Avatâras he exclaimed, "Had I lived in Palestine, in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed His Feet, not with my tears, but with my heart's blood !"

Days would pass in dwelling on the ideals of Christ and then from Jerusalem they would be transported to Dakshineswar, and the Personality of Sri Ramakrishna would loom in their souls as a Great Light. And Norendra would speak, now with tears, now with joy, of the Master, and the monks would reflect his emotions until the whole monastery was afire with passionate love for the Master. Those were wonderful days !

On one occasion, they kept Good Friday. They fasted the whole day and prayed, allowing themselves only some grapes for nourishment. During their hours of meditation a Salvation Army man chanced to come, calling upon them in the Name of Jesus. The whole monastery eagerly gathered round him, saying, "Tell us all about Good Friday !" He seemed puzzled. He said, "I know the story of the Crucifixion, but nothing about Good Friday. We only keep two festivals, one being Christmas Day and another the birthday of General Booth. The monks fell from ecstasy to impatience. They took the man's Bible from him and chased him forth with the remark, "How strange ! You know nothing of the Day of the Lord's Crucifixion !" Then one monk, taking compassion upon the unfortunate man, called him back, gave him food and returned his Bible to him. Bewildered, the man left the monastery, saying, "What manner of men are these ! Who are they ! They seem like followers of Jesus !"

Koviloor Digital Library

At other times, Norendra would relate to them the life of Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Ignatius of Loyola and the founding of the Franciscan and the Jesuitic Orders, and would initiate them into the passionate spiritual forms upon which the structures of these Orders were founded; Many, many times they would sit together, swaying themselves to and fro to the terrible music of Saint Francis' words, "Welcome Sister Death ! Welcome, welcome Sister Death !" until death lost all its terrors and the monks would see its shadows as great rays of light, and Yama, the King of Death, would become transformed into one of the Effulgent Forms of Nârâyana Himself. At another time, the Leader would imbue them with the "Imitation of Christ" by Thomas à Kempis. They became so saturated with the message of this scripture that with the Christian mystic they would exclaim, "Silence all ye teachers ! And silence, ye prophets ! Speak Thou alone, O Lord, unto my soul !". The "Imitation" was a favourite book with the Order at this time. It was superseded eventually by that paragon of Indian Gospels, the Bhagavad-Gita. The monks revelled in the Bhagavad-Gita, soaring on its contents to the farthest heights of the spiritual regions. Not satisfied with having the fruits of these two wondrous books themselves, they begged sufficient funds to circulate some hundreds of copies of them amongst the people, making them equally the possessors of their own spiritual treasures.

And many times, again, it was all stillness at the monastery, and perhaps the only voice to be heard in the garden and the evening quiet was the musical voice of the chief disciple. Whilst the others meditated in the chapel or upon the Ganges side, he would be seen wandering through the evening shadows singing in various tones, "Mother ! Mother ! Brahmamayi !" and then, perhaps, from singing he would plunge into the Inner Silence, beneath the spreading branches of the Bilva tree.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXI

THE DAYS OF THE SAINTS.

Indeed, those were memorable days at the Baranagore Math. In the reading of the story one is brought back, as it were, to the time of Saint Francis of Assisi and his disciples. It was all burning ecstasy and tremendous asceticism. It was the re-kindling and re-quickening of the great spiritual Flame which burned at Dakshineswar as the Effulgent Enlightenment of many souls. Poverty and blessedness intermingled in a strange beauty and loveliness, and it was true of the monks that they lived not by bread alone. There was oftentimes a great scarcity of food even, but they were upheld by the stimulating consciousness of the Divine Glory and by the power of meditation and of prayer. They were bathed in the waters of spiritual wisdom, and to them the presence of Sri Ramakrishna was a living fact. And Noren, as his *gurubhais* called him, was the compelling guide, the Leader in it all. He set their souls on fire with the memory of the Master's words. He surcharged their souls with ecstasy in the narration of the Master's Message. And the practice of austerities took up the whole time of the monks. They were in right earnest for the realisation of God. They were consumed with the longing to see God. Whether the body went was of little consequence. And the Leader would say, "Even if death comes,—what of that! Are we not even wishing death to come and relieve us of the pain of separation from the Lord!"

The monks of Sri Ramakrishna were in these days greatly averse to preaching. Their ideal was the silent realisation of God, first and foremost, and after that, if need be, silent preaching without the consciousness of doing it, even as the Master had done. Norendra himself deepened this idea among his *gurubhais*. He constantly insisted that

Kovilloor Digital Library

before one preaches one must be fit to preach, and that their present concern was "Man-making" and "Realisation." But at times the Spirit of the Preacher would come upon him. Then the Leader would say, "Every one is preaching, but what they do unconsciously I will do consciously. Aye, even if you, my brother-monks, stand in my way, I will go and preach among the pariahs in the lowest slums." Again he would say, "Preaching means *expression*." And then he referred to the great Trailanga Swami of Benares who lay prostrate constantly before the Image of Shiva in silent absorption, refusing even to answer questions, save rarely by signs or by writing a word or two, and said, "Because Trailanga Swami remains silent and never talks with any one, do you think he does no preaching. His very silence is *preaching*! Even the trees and plants are preaching!" Then in wonderful words he would tell them that popular story of the Saint who when accosted by a king as to the Nature and the Name of God remained silent, until finally the monarch pressing him, he said, "O king! All this time I have been telling you. For, *Silence* is his Name!" And the monks would themselves repair into the solitude and stillness of the meditative state. Yes, Vivekananda was to preach *consciously* and in soul-stirring eloquence that which hitherto the saints had done in Silence. In Baranagore this great task commenced and the audience was the group of monks and devotees. He preached to them until their hearts longed for realisation, because of the intensity of thought and spiritual feeling.

The Swami was always a man of many moods and diverse ways of thinking. Now he will be a Bhakta of Bhaktas, now a Jnâni of Jnânis. Now he would speak to his brother-monks, or to some lay disciple, prostrating to them in his heart, "Can you tell me how humility comes! Can you tell me how I can get rid of this ego and *ahamkâra*!" And the monks and devotees would reprove him mildly for his humility, by reminding him of what Sri Ramakrishna had predicted concerning him and by saying, "Mahârâj, your ego is of and for God. He has kept this ego in you for His own

Koviloor Digital Library

good purposes. His object is that you shall work." Then he would rise beyond humility and beyond all sense of dependence into the Highest Advaita consciousness and all would repeat with him, "*Aham Brahmasmi !*" I am Brahman ! "*Sachchidanandarupa Shivoham !*" I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute !" And at the very next moment the Swami would remark, affected by a different mood, "Through immeasurable pain and suffering I am what I am now. I believe that without pain and suffering, resignation and absolute dependence upon God are not possible." Then he and the Brothers would practise austerities all the more. In Baranagore, always, the balance of the spiritual scales varied between the fervour of Bhakti and the insight of Jnânam, between the *tasting* of the sweetness of the Lord and the practising of *becoming* That itself. Sometimes the prayer would be that of the Sage Prahlad, "O Lord, that deathless attachment which the worldly-minded have for the fleeting objects of the senses,—as I keep meditating on Thee—may not that same intensity of love for Thee slip away from my heart !" At other times the effort would be to realise the very foundation-ground and substance of the soul itself as one with the Lord. And this was divinely consistent, for, are not the Lover and the Beloved made One in the ecstasy of Bhakti ? Verily, the Bhakta in Bhakti must be merged ; the Bhakta and the Lord must be One in the Light of the realisation of Jnânam beyond the ignorance and darkness of the world." So Sri Ramakrishna Himself had taught and realised, and He was their Ideal.

The spiritual condition at Baranagore was wonderful in these days. Those who came to the monastery marvelled at the austerities of him who became the Swami Vivekananda, and of his brother-monks. And they say of them, even now, "It is impossible for men to bear such rigorous hardships and and practise such *tapasyâ* as they used to do at this period." And yet they were never altogether satisfied with their ascetic spiritual practices, and in their sorrow in not realising God they would sigh, "O how

Koviloor Digital Library

wonderful were the *vairagyam* and the *vyâkulatâ*, or intense longing for God, which Sri Ramakrishna had! And we cannot even do one-sixteenth part of what he taught! How miserable is our state! O we are utterly worthless!" In very truth the soul of the Leader, above all, was so full of fire and austerity that he deemed even the hardest forms of asceticism as *nothing*. It would seem, in such moments, as if his very body would burst, giving way at the tremendous onrush of his yearning and sincerity. Often he would sit in meditation in the early evening, and the whole night long he would remain motionless, absorbed in spiritual thought. The monks would not dare approach him in these hours. Possibly when the sun was in the eastern sky, he would arise, his eyes red with the strain of concentration and a strange atmosphere of blessedness about him. And the other monks would follow him in this; and though they led such an intense life of spirituality yet they would lament with him, "O we are not doing enough to realise God!"

The great Nâg Mahâshaya came occasionally. He was that disciple of the Master who threw his medicine chest into the Ganges, giving up the medical profession, the only means of his living, when he heard Sri Ramakrishna say, "The mind which is always thinking of disease and is couped up within the apothecary's phials, cannot see God." What renunciation! What self-surrender! It was he who insisted on looking upon the chief disciple of the Master as Shiva Himself embodied, and regarded the monastery as the most holy temple of Kashi Vishvanath!

Nâg Mahâshaya lived in a low tiled hut near the banks of the Ganges, in the Kumartoli section of Calcutta. After the passing of the Master, an intense yearning for Realisation came upon him and he spent days and nights in weeping for the Beatific Vision of God. Indeed he was like a madman. He would eat nothing. Sometimes a friend would force him to eat. Otherwise, so great was his intensity and agony of spiritual desire that he forgot the body and all physical requirements. The monks of the

Koviloor Digital Library

Baranagore Math heard of the condition of Nâg Mahâshaya, and the Leader himself went from the monastery to visit the shrine of Nâg Mahâshaya, for verily was it a shrine and he the Saint therein. The Leader had heard that for four or five days the great devotee had eaten nothing in spite of the entreaties of his friends. When he with the Monks Turiyânanda and Akhandananda came to the hut they found Nâg Mahâshaya lying under the cover of a quilt, writhing in agony for God, like one suffering from a paroxysm of high fever. The Leader said, "Dear Nâg Mahâshaya, we are to-day your *atithis*, your guests. We have come to beg food of you." His intention in thus speaking was, that the host after offering the food to the Lord and serving it to them would have to partake of something as Prasad at least. At once Nâg Mahâshaya was up, crying out that he was glad to be of service to the sons of the Master. He ran to the bazaar, purchased the necessary articles and himself prepared the food. The meal was ready, and the Swami and his *gurubhâis* partook of a sumptuous feast, wisely laying aside a sufficient quantity for their host as they could not prevail upon him to eat with them. Following upon the meal the Swami requested Nâg Mahâshaya to come and eat. He pressed him; he insisted, but all to no purpose; and Nâg Mahâshaya seeing the determination of the monks to make him eat, took up the earthen jar containing the cooked rice and struck his head forcibly with it, so that the jar fell broken to the ground, whilst the Saint repeatedly cried out with violent emotion, "Eh! Shall I give food to this wretched body by which God is not realised!" Therewith he began to throw the sweets and other things upon the ground. Wonderful was Nâg Mahâshaya! Seeing this divine madness of the devotee, Swamiji could with great difficulty restrain his tears. He succeeded, however, after long persuasion and repeated assurance of God's mercy to him, to make him eat something.

And there were times when the Leader himself would weep, crying out, "O what are all my realisations! I have seen the *Mantram* in letters of gold and shining with effulgence!

Koviloor Digital Library

How many times have I not seen the Forms of Mother Kali and those of the Personal God! But, O where, O where is Peace! I am dissatisfied with everything. It all seems so distasteful to me, even talking to devotees! I want the highest bliss of Sachchidanandam! It seems there is no such thing as God. Let me starve to death and see if I cannot plunge into the Beyond, beyond all limitations of Name and Form!" Was this the memory of that august moment in Cossipur when he had realised the Very Highest in the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi! No wonder he was dissatisfied with Forms. Had he not seen the Formless! It is no wonder that the monks loved and adored him! One of the Bhaktas seeing him at the Math wrote in his diary: "To-day Norendra has put on a new gerrua cloth. How fascinating he appears! His face is full of the fire of Wisdom, and yet behold how it is mellowed with Divine Love! Blessed are these monks who are thinking day and night of God!"

Such was the atmosphere of saintship and beatitude about them! Nâg Mahâshaya, indeed, spoke for all the rest when he said, referring to the Leader, "I have understood him too little to speak of him to others. I am as a poor *sudra*, but I believe what the Master said of him is true, that in any other age hardly ever has such a great power taken human form! If he wishes he can make anyone free!" And he spoke of the monks in such terms as, "He who thinks of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples as ordinary men entertains a brute idea." When he visited the Math the Swami would have to force him to sit down and have his meal with them, for, in his great humility, he would shrink from doing so. And Nâg Mahâshaya would cry out, "Why give food to this body which has not realised God!"

The spirit of true Sannyas was upon all. And the Leader would say in protest to a householder's argument, "What! Even if we do not see God, shall we return to the refuse of the senses? Shall we degrade our higher nature? No matter what comes, let us live for the Ideal! Let the body go! Let everything go! Are we not the Children of Sri Ramakrishna?"

The monks had great respect for the lay disciples of

Kailash Digital Library

the Lord. And the Swami Vivekananda himself said, referring to Nâg Mahâshaya, "Our whole life is spent in searching for that Honey which is Truth! You, Nâg Mahâshaya, are blessed, since you are a Bee sucking that Sweet Honey all the time!" Turning to the disciples he added, "He is a true son of Sri Ramakrishna. He has truly realised Him!" And in the latter part of his life when he visited Dacca and saw the house of this great saint, who had passed away two years before, the Swami Vivekananda said, "Those who have served Nâg Mahâshaya with devotion need no more *sadhana*. I have travelled all over the world but have not come across another saint like Nâg Mahâshaya! I have known him for twenty-five years, but have not marked any ebb and flow in his devotions. Saturated with one uniform trend of feeling, with his heart ever fixed in prayer to God, calm and unmoved in adversity and physical sufferings, he is an object-lesson of how to live *in* the world the unworldly life! O what a wonderful faith, what a longing for Realisation he had!"

The monks drew inspiration, each from the other. The Swami Vivekananda recalling these blessed days to a disciple, many years later, said, "O! What a steadfastness to the Ideal do we ever find in Soshi!" Soshi was our house-mother. It was he who managed all about our food by begging. O we used to get up at three o'clock in the morning. Then all of us, some after bath, others without it, would go to the Worship-room and be lost in *Japam* and in meditation! Times were when the meditation practices continued up to four or five o'clock in the morning, or to four or five o'clock in the evening. Soshi would wait with our dinners ready, or sometimes by sheer force drag us out of our meditation. Who cared then if the world existed or not!" And the Leader would alternately praise the ecstasy of one or the faith of another, the Bhakti of one or the virtues of another, often calling Rakhal a mountain of spirituality. Thus it was that the Saints lived, for whatever the world may think or say these men were Saints, and their Vision was ever in God!

Kovilloor Digital Library

There is nothing greater than God; yet God Himself is the devotee of His Devotees; and what wondrous devotees were these monks, these Sons of Sri Ramakrishna! What a lion amongst monks was the Leader,—the Noren of Dakshineswar days. And the Baranagore monastery,—what worlds of spirituality and supreme insight does it call forth in the memory! Verily, to the large number of devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and the Swami Vivekananda the word "Baranagore" is synonymous with "spiritual Sadhana". If the Garden of Dakshineswar was literally saturated with the Divine Presence and the blessedness thereof, the monastery of Baranagore was none the less so, for in those days these young spiritual heroes who had sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna, developed the greatest strength and holiness each was capable of. These trained spiritual lions, had about them an air of defiance of the universe itself, so prominent in the saints of all ages, so that those who came within the sphere of their influence were caught up in their spirit of God-intoxication. Here were these young men whom Sri Ramakrishna had made his very own, each one representing a phase, in the degree of manifestation, of the Master himself, undergoing with the delight of children the most austere of ascetic practices, calling on the name of the Lord until their voices gave way and they sank into the state of meditation.

Indeed, the very atmosphere of the monastery was vibrant with spiritual consciousness. It seemed as if even the trees, the grass, the birds, and the lights of day and the shadows of night had taken up the threnody of their burning renunciation and *vairâgyam*! The world had no meaning for the monks. They had brought the Highest Freedom of the Highest Spheres down to the earthly plane. They were aware only of God; and in those days there was lighted a certain fire which nothing has as yet extinguished; nor can it ever be extinguished, because it is the Fire of the Spirit; and it has swept with hurricane force across the land, spreading the Gospel of Ramakrishna. And the monks were as so

Koviloor Digital Library

many leaping tongues of that Fire; and the most soaring flame was the soul of the chief disciple of the Master. He was the centre and the heart of all this spiritual fervour. Verily, saints are the true heroes!

And in those days every one was filled with the Spirit of the Master. There was not a day in which his Personality was not most realistically felt. And for these men there was neither day nor night, there were neither hours nor moments, —for they dwelt in Sublime Beatitude. And those who came as visitors to the monastery were struck with wonder. "Who are these men?" they asked, "Their eyes are aflame. They seem like madmen!"——and indeed, they were mad, mad after God. And all sorts of spiritual experiences were theirs. Some sat motionless for hours plunged in meditation, whilst others sang themselves into devotional rapture until the body sank from sheer exhaustion. The Leader, who was to shake the world with the spiritual power he possessed, threw his whole heart into Sadhanas and stirred the souls of his brother-monks to ecstasy. It seemed oftentimes as if the monks would burst all bonds and casting off their bodies, like disused garments, rise into the Sphere which Ramakrishna had attained. In those days life and death were really one and the same to them. What mattered death? Some of the monks would spend the nights in burning-ghats watching the devouring flames of death lick up the stiffened corpse, until they rose on the wings of meditation upon death into the glorious awareness of the indestructible. And others would make vows unto themselves to *force* vision and insight. Others again would tell their beads the whole day and the whole night long, whilst others sat night after night before a great *dhuni*, *determined* to know Reality. Day after day this state of things continued, and whenever the Leader found his *gurubhâis* practising too severe austerities and Sadhanas, he would burst out saying, "Do you think you are all going to be Ramakrishna Paramahamsas? That will never be. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is born once in the world!" or he would say, "Have you forgotten the Master's

Koyiloor Digital Library

parable of the ant and the mountain of sugar? You are as so many ants, and God the mountain of sugar. One grain of sugar is enough for you, and you are thinking like the ant to carry away the whole mountain!"

The Master enthroned in a tabernacle in the Math, was the Living Presence, ever ready to receive His Children. He was worshipped daily, and the *bhajana* before him was soul-stirring. The usual liturgy was celebrated, *mantrams* were recited, lights waved, incense burned, the conch-shells blown and gongs beaten in joyous adoration. And in the twilight hours of early evening the chant arose, the monks uniting their voices in prayer and praise. As Shiva, the God of monks, was one of their Ideals, they would chant before the Image of Sri Ramakrishna at the time of *âratrika*, or evening service, a certain uplifting and soul-inspiring verse, as it is dramatically chanted in the Eternal City of Benares, during the *âratrika* in the temple of Vishwanath, the Lord of the universe, whilst the priests sit round the Sacred Image,—

"Jaya Shiva Omkara! Bhaja Shiva Omkara!
Brahmâ, Vishnu, Sadashiva! Hara! Hara! Shiva Mahadeva!"

And in the rapture of the moment he who became the apostle of Hinduism and the foremost figure at the World's Parliament of Religions, sitting in meditation posture, would often lose himself in the Vision of Shiva-Brahman.

Sri Ramakrishna was treated as though he were physically present and was offered food, the purest and the choicest that the monks could procure,—though because of their poverty they could not spare more than a few pice a day. Still devotion sustained them; and there was one who walked amongst them and encouraged them constantly to the vision of the Highest,—he who had been the chief disciple and was now prince of monks amongst them.

But in truth there was no distinction made as of one being greater or lesser than another. They were all equally inhabitants of another world than this,—the world of the

Koviloor Digital Library

monastic consciousness. All laboured side by side in performing the duties of the monastery; and of all, in this respect, the Swami Ramakrishnananda was the head and heart. As the Swami Vivekananda afterwards spoke of him, "He was the main pillar of the Math. Without him the monastery would have been impossible." Indeed, he it was who remained in constant spiritual attendance upon the Master, even when the spirit of Shiva, the spirit of the wandering Sannyâsin came upon the rest. And he it was who was the *pujâri* and the "mother" of the Math; he was the self-constituted guardian of the rest in practical matters, literally "routing them out" of meditation and ecstasy to attend to the ordinary duties and needs of life. Though he was himself possessed of prayer and insight to the fulness of the heart, he *made* himself remember their wants. And he would "drive" them to their bath or to their scanty meal. Visitors poured in; the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna came whenever opportunity allowed. "To get away from the world and be with the household of their Master," as they said. And there would be *Sankirtana* and dancing in the name of the Lord the whole day long; or the hours would speed by in inspiring talks, and in the narrative of the lives of the Blessed Ones. And their souls were lifted up to the Highest Heaven, and they revelled in the consciousness of purity and freedom, being buoyed up with hope and faith in the Master, to whom they had given their hearts and souls. Aye, if the monks were to become enraged at the drifting of circumstances or at what seemed to them the meagre results of spiritual efforts, they became enraged with the Master Himself, even as children are wroth with their mother. Verily, unless one becomes even as a child he shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Long discussions were often held, the monks dividing themselves into two parties and arguing alternately the merits of some spiritual truth. And from intellectual discussions their souls would comprehend the parallel aspect of all truth,—one truth implying the other, one aspect of reality

Koviloor Digital Library

necessarily showing the vision of all others. And perceiving the unity of all truth, they would sing sometimes that stanza which epitomises the One All-comprehensive Truth and which Sri Ramakrishna often quoted, "*Brahma Satyam Jagan-mithyâ; Jiva Bramhaiva nâparah,*" which means, "Verily Brahman is Real and the world unreal. And the soul itself is in no wise different from Brahman." Thereupon, perhaps, they would chant the Nirvana Shatkam' or the six stanzas on Nirvana, all crying out, "Shivoham! Shivoham!"

O the memory of those blessed days of ecstasy! This was the foundation-ground of all that which has since come in the way of Siva and and Sevâ,—meditation upon God and service unto men,—this and the spirit of Dakshineswar. This was the Great Epoch, steeped in radiant, spiritual, sonant light, in the life of the Swami Vivekananda. Baranagore was a continuation of Dakshineswar *and the Master was there* too, as his Presence was felt and sensed *there* more than ever; and the Leader with his Brothers, afresh from the experience of Dakshineswar and Cossipur, lived the same life, thought the same great thoughts and was conscious in the same fervent manner of the Reality That Is. Does one desire to understand Vivekananda, let him see the man through the perspective of the monastery of Baranagore, where the Swami fulfilled the prophecy of Kedar, a devotee, who had told him in the time of Sri Ramakrishna when he argued against the idea of the Personal God, "Now you are all intellectual, you are all Advaita; but the time will come when in spite of your Advaita you will literally roll on the ground with Blessedness at the very Name of God!" Yes, so it was with the Swami now. His soul was on fire, his heart would beat faster at the Name of God; he prayed, he sang, he wept, he laughed, he danced in ecstasy. And again at other times he would rise to the full spiritual consciousness of the Advaita, sojourning on the mountain heights of Jnanam

Koviloor Digital Library

LXII

THE PARIVRAJAKA TENDENCY.

Thus the monks lived their life, succeeding the Master's Nirvana, in the glory of the soul, in the rhapsodies of insight, in holiness and in ecstasy, consolidating the monastic Order of Ramakrishna at Baranagore. But even as the feature of the Order was twofold,—that of an itinerant monkhood insisting on personal freedom, and that of the monkhood bound by a common love to the Master and organised by the inspiration of a divine life with a mission to fulfill,—so there is respectively seen two varying streams of tendency in the personality of each member, and in the Leader these were emphasised particularly. Though they were all united into a Brotherhood, the Indian ideals of Sannyâs pressed in upon them in various ways, and there were times when it seemed the Sadhu tendency would *force* them out into the highroads of isolated Sannyâsin life. If the above mentioned twofold feature is kept in mind, it is readily seen that the Order was at all times consistent, for there was always a group which remained at Baranagore, representing the Ramakrishna Brotherhood, even when most of the monks influenced by a religious restlessness were abroad in distant provinces. And up to the present day is this the case. The Eastern and Western ideals in monasticism were not to be made subservient to each other; they were to grow simultaneously as two blossoms on the one spiritual stem. The compact nature of an organisation must be kept intact; the life of the *parivrâjaka* must also be kept intact. Those who chose could remain as long as they desired in the monastery; those who chose, were at liberty to leave it, even as the fancy moved them. Some monks were permanently at the monastery for several years, whilst others were away, wandering almost constantly. And from the year 1891,

Kovilpoor Digital Library

for nearly seven years the Leader himself was absent. When he became the *parivrâjaka*, he was buried in forgottenness ; none of his Brothers knew his whereabouts, though often they made efforts to find him out. But since the passing of Sri Ramakrishna for about four years he was, on and off, with his *gurubhâis*, either at Baranagore, or in the company of one or more of them on various pilgrimages, and only for short periods by himself. Then in the beginning of the year 1891 he broke free from his brother-monks, leaving them finally at Delhi and wandering throughout the whole extent of Hindusthan. When by themselves, the monks communicated with the monastery, or did not, just as they pleased. In thus embodying the two ideals of Eastern and Western monasticism, the Order of Ramakrishna has proved itself to be one of the most unique institutions, not only in India, but in the history of monasticism as a whole in any country, or in any age.

The tendency to pilgrimage was manifested even from the beginning, for several of the monks, as soon as the Master had departed, accompanied the Holy Mother to Brindaban, where they made a stay of several months. Indeed, Yogananda remained there for well nigh one entire year, being absent, even as Latoo, at the time of the visit to the village of Antpur. The first incident of actual "breaking away" from the monastery occurred some several months after the Master's Nirvana, following close upon the founding of the Order. The monk Sarada, who became the Swami Trigunatita, left the monastery one day abruptly, saying to his Brother that he was "going away somewhere," and confiding his plans to none. The Leader who had been to Calcutta for the day, hearing of this on his return, became greatly agitated, because he knew that the young monk had no experience of the world and would be likely to meet with some serious misfortune, or he might foolishly expose himself to too great risk in his zeal for asceticism. The Leader addressing Rakhal "Raja," who even in these early days was recognised by him as his successor, said, "Why did you let him go ?

Kovilloor Digital Library

Now, see here, what a terrible fix I am in! This is another *Samsara* of Maya I have created for myself. This boy makes me exceedingly anxious." Indeed, the Leader's heart had become ensnared in the net of deep attachment for his *gurubhâis*, for whom he felt himself responsible, and most of whom were younger than himself; consequently Sarada's flight wrung his heart with pain. A note was handed to the Leader which the monk had left for him. It read, "I am going to Brindaban on foot. It is dangerous for me to stay here. Ideas may change. Formerly I used to dream of home and parents. Then I saw the Form of Mâyâ. Twice I have suffered much. Indeed, twice I had to return home. Hence I am going away to a far-off place to avoid the danger." And Raja said, "You see, for these reasons he has gone," and after a pause he added, "and I myself am thinking of going on pilgrimage." The Leader expostulated, stating the uselessness of such a course in the realising of God, but the tendency was at work and *nothing* could control it, for the Blood of the Race was calling to the Grand Ideals of Sannyâsin Life.

But the Leader's own mind was also working along the line of the *parivrâjaka*. He thought, "Well, they are manifesting a desire to go out. That may even mean the breaking-up of the monastery. But who am I to dictate terms? I may break the bondage myself some day as well. And of all my bondages my attachment to them is the strongest." And, day by day, a greater and greater restlessness made itself evident in the conscious mind of the Leader,—coming up from the deep currents of the subconscious mind. Thus, after several months' time he is seen filled with the most radical ideals of Sannyâs. He would alarm the monks with his strenuous determination and reveal the other side of his monastic genius. He would become a living tempest of Sannyâs. Sarada's resoluteness was like the small cloud on the horizon, of the Call of the wandering life of the Sadhu, but the Leader became as the storm itself. And the monks wavered; they too were filled with the same desire. Though they loved him even as their

Koviloor Digital Library

own souls, they could not beg him to remain, for he was but following the inevitable impulse of the monastic consciousness, roused by speaking of pilgrimage and the *parivrâjaka* life. Radical as he always was, possessed at one time of a given ideal in its most intense form, the Leader was now up in arms against the very idea of living together in a monastery. As he himself put it in his later days, "I used to fire them to break it up and go about the world begging. But on no account could I make Soshi yield. He would hear nothing of the kind. You must know him to be the backbone of our Math !"

It was always so ; the Swami would impart certain ideas which would become fixed in the minds of his *gurubhais*, whilst he himself journeyed on to other stages in the spheres of thought, again leaving them to absorb the new ideas he discovered. As the spirit of the holy wanderer grew more intense in the Leader, several of the Brothers were influenced by his eloquence "to strike out into the Unknown Paths of Sadhu life." One by one they went out, until after a time only a few were in the monastery under the loving care of Soshi, who stood unflinchingly by the relics of the Master. Now some would go and some would return, and others who had meanwhile remained would in their turn go away. From time to time the Leader himself would be gone, wandering as a lion, seeking forgottenness, despising all bondage, even the sweetest, until finally he resolved to break asunder the last of bonds—that of his *gurubhâis*—in Hrishikesh, the centre of Indian monasticism. The wilderness, the mountain-tops, the lonely jungle paths, the forest caves—the vision of those possessed him and with the loftiest of impulses he left Baranagore. The monastery seemed deserted ; to all appearances it was so, but if one could see the fire in the eyes of Soshi and the little group that remained he would see that in spirit the whole Brotherhood was there.

The first wanderings of the Swami were, one might say, in the way of "temporary absences". He would sally forth on one journey or one pilgrimage after another, but would

Koviloor Digital Library

for some reason or other return against his will. Whensoever, he left his *gurubhais* "it would be for good and all, this time," as he would say, but inevitably something would force him back. In two instances it was the serious illness of certain of his brother-monks, in another the death of a great householder-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. But in January 1891 he accomplished his purpose, "to be lost to all that he held near and dear, and wander staff and begging-bowl in hand, as a free Sannyâsin, having only his own soul for companionship." On previous occasions it was different, for the monks would not let him go alone. He, their beloved Leader, must always be accompanied at least by one, if only to be near to serve him and give the others word concerning him. He would consent to this arrangement in order to allay their fears, but once on his wanderings, he would keep strict watch over the chosen *gurubhâi* so that he might not inform the others as to his whereabouts. He had his reasons for this strict secrecy. He desired that the monks should be absolutely self-reliant, and that they should feel that they could easily do *without* him. Then, too, he felt the burden, and he was spiritually impatient to be left alone. Besides, he desired to perform special penances and extreme *tapasyâ* and so sought quiet and solitude away in some deserted spot, either adjacent to or distant from a place of pilgrimage. Also, he was anxious to know the whole of India in a geographical and social sense, even as he already knew it in a deep historical sense. Whenever he would leave the monastery, for some days previous he would talk to the monks with such earnestness and fire that they would not dare press him to remain. He would become irresistible, and with pain and resignation they would watch him pass through the monastery gates with such a companion as was favoured to accompany him. And each time they thought, "Now, it may be that this is the last time we shall see our Noren. Perhaps now, we bid him farewell for ever." When for the first few times he returned, they made the occasion a grea

Koviloor Digital Library

festival; and when they could get no news of him, especially after 1891—they hoped and prayed.

The days of the Leader, as the wandering monk, are the most interesting of all. They are full of spiritual romance. Many, many times he changed his Sannyâsin name, so as not to leave any trace of himself behind. For often during his travels his words and spirit gathered groups of admirers about him, and one friend seeing another would say, "Come! There is a wonderful Sadhu who has just arrived. You *must* see him." And those who saw him would tell numerous others, or would write to their friends in places which the Swami might visit so that the news of his advent preceded him. Therefore, to avoid further attention and fame he would suddenly leave the place to which he had just come, changing his name and thus keeping others from following his track. Some of his *gurubhâis* travelling in the same province as he, would hear of "a great Sadhu, a Mahâtmâ," and from the description given of him, they knew that it was none other than he, and they would immediately travel in pursuit, "chasing him from place to place" to use their own expression. But never, save in two instances, did they meet him, and then too he sent them forth, even threatening them if they followed him,—for he was determined to be left alone. As the *parivrâjaka*, the Leader would force asceticism upon himself, many times concealing his great learning and his knowledge of the English language in order to appear as an ordinary Sadhu. There were times when he took the vow to ask for nothing, but wait always for food and drink till they were offered. He told someone that the longest time he had ever gone without any food, under this austerity, was for five days. Many times his habitation was a jungle, or a ruined *dharmasala* by the wayside. Many times he was alone under the starry skies, or on foot in scorching heat, or in the rain, always thinking infinite thoughts and dreaming wondrous dreams. One can even see him now, as by himself, or with a Brother, entering a city or a village, begging his food from door to door, calling, "Narayana Hari!" In these travels, when alone, he took the vow of not touching money, and all manner of

Kovilpoor Digital Library

fortune overtook him, sometimes good, sometimes bad, but he was always indifferent to either. Sometimes at the earnest entreaty of a devotee he would avail himself of a ticket to travel by the train; at other times he would walk afoot. But at all times his thoughts were of the highest and his soul in communion with the Lord.

His very appearance as a wandering monk was, in itself, remarkable. It was regal,—his whole body, a manifestation of grace; his luminous eyes and imperious personality, and a certain unmistakable mark of greatness he had with him, made him conspicuous wherever he went. Staff and *kamandalu* in hand, a copy of the Gita and The Imitation of Christ in his possession, and a *Gerruâ* cloth and *Alkhalla* for clothing, he journeyed on in silence, always in joyous light-heartedness. These were the most glorious moments in the life of the Swami Vivekananda when, to use his own words, he

"Lived in mountain-caves, on cremation grounds,
By the Ganges and other sacred streams:
And how many days have been passed on alms!

"Friendless, clad in rags, with no possession,
Feeding from door to door on what chance would bring:
The frame broken under *tapasyâ's* weight!
....."

Koviloor Digital Library

LXIII

THE ITINERANT MONK.

With the exception of several unimportant journeys, more in the nature of "excursions" from the monastery, the Leader did not leave Baranagore until the year 1888 was well on the way. He had paid flying visits to Vaidyanath, Shimultola, and for the second time to Antpur, whither he had gone after the earnest solicitation of those who loved him and who felt that he needed a short rest from the strenuous life of the monastery and a change from its environment.

Sarada's sudden flight had not upset him long, for the absent monk soon returned, fearing lest he might cause too much anxiety to his brother-monks by a prolonged absence. What troubled the Leader most was the *parivrâjaka* tendency which many of the monks had exhibited, more or less. True, he had himself thundered in the ears of the monks, that after all it would be best "to be thrown out" into the uncertain fortune of the life of a wandering Sannyâsin; but in this respect, in spite of his enthusiasm, there was a slight undercurrent of apprehension. But in this he dared to tempt fate as he did throughout his life. Then, too, Soshi's "iron-clad" determination seemed in his mind to be the very cornerstone, vast and immovable, in the spiritual sense, of the structure of the Order. So, in a measure he was satisfied. He made up his mind, however, not to allow himself to be too much concerned about the future of the monastery. He had decided to become the *parivrâjaka*; and, having once made up his mind, nothing could change him. He had decided to accept anything that might come as the result of his prolonged absence. He unburdened himself of all responsibility, even going so far as to cut all bonds with the monks of Sri Ramakrishna, thus making them absolutely dependent on their own efforts and upon the Master. In certain hours

Koviloor Digital Library

of this period he thought of himself as "a plain Sadhu," without any position and without any privilege.

As for the monks, he said to himself in the stronger moments of his own resolution, "Let them have their experiences. They must *break* from the monastery and *test* their own strength. Their experiences of the new life will make them *men*, absolutely fearless and invincible, and spiritually independent; thus they will become giants." However vague this thought and hope might have been in the Leader's mind, it was a prophetic presentiment of what was to come. In his heart he felt sure of his brother-monks, and sure of the Order and the Mission it was to fulfil. It was however a struggle for him to make himself free, and the contents of his mind wavered between the promptings of the *parivrâjaka* life and those of his own sense of responsibility for the brotherhood. Eventually the former had sway, and it was good that it should be so, for, before the Indian monk is bound down to anything he is bound to his own freedom. He freed himself from the bondage of it all and the sense of *having* to lead. But it was after a long deliberation and a slow but final determination. It took, in fact, almost a year of "being swayed to and fro on the tides of great uncertainty." Everything tended, however, to consolidate his views, for even as early as October in the year after the Master's departure, several of the Brothers, amongst them being Sarat and Niranjan, were seriously planning to go to Puri to perform Sadhana, whilst others were speaking of making the northern pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri amidst the snows, whither the Swami Akhandananda had already gone, restless and impatient for the very Highest Realisation.

There are necessarily some blanks in this immediate portion of the reading of the Swami Vivekananda's life, for he himself was indifferent as to the recording of his plans and journeys and spoke of them afterwards vaguely, referring to them only in a casual way. Then, too, he held, as do all monks, certain of his spiritual experiences during this time as too sacred to be disclosed, even in private. And

Kovilloor Digital Library

yet it is not as if nothing is known of him as the *parivrâjaka*. The monks who sometimes accompanied him, and those householders whom he met and initiated as lay disciples on his long tours throughout the land, have most faithfully recorded the happenings during the time he lived with them, including, in fact, even the conversations which were carried on. Thus one builds up a compact knowledge of his life from 1887 to 1893, from which period he himself was mostly in the glare of publicity and told the tale of his life by his constant activities. Those monks who were with him in one or other of his travels until the time when he entirely broke off communication with the Baranagore Math, and who have become, as it were, the verbal historians of their leader's life were the Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Yogananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda, Akhandananda, Niranjanananda, Shivananda, Advaitananda, Trigunatita, Abhedananda, Nirmalananda and Sadananda. At different times these different monks were the companions of the Leader in his travels in these days, but of all of them, the Swami Akhandananda remained with him for the longest period at a time, being with him from the end of July, 1890, till the latter part of the autumn of the same year.

The first definite journey on which the Leader set out from the Baranagore Math was when he suddenly left Calcutta for ancient Kashi, also known as Benares. With only the barest necessities he went forth, leaving the monks to wonder whither he was going. Ah, how long he had anticipated the joy of visiting Benares, the most sacred stronghold of Hinduism for ages upon ages,—Benares, the home of monks, the centre of learning, the Seat of Shiva Himself. He had pondered oftentimes over its spiritual and intellectual glories and its monastic grandeurs. The most sacred waters of the Ganges, the praying scores of votaries, the numerous temples, the immemorial atmosphere of holiness, the place where Lord Buddha and Sri Sankara preached—all these made a thrilling appeal to his fiery imagination. When from the bridge which spans

Koviloor Digital Library

the river he saw the splendid sweep of the citadel-like embankments with their palaces and temples, he was wrapt in wonder and in worship. He saw also the ruins of other temples, peering above the water's edge, giving the whole place an air of that sombre magnificence which lingers about vast historic ruins. One sees him entering the city, visiting the temples, bathing in the Ganges, praying and meditating on the walled embankments, interviewing monks. One sees him musing in the silence on the fame and greatness of the Sanâtana Dharma and strengthened in the monastic consciousness. In this great centre of Hinduism, in this seat of learning and meditation, all the Glory of Hinduism shone forth for him and he saw the whole civilisation of India in a new light; he realised that at the bottom of the sea of the Indian consciousness was the Over-Soul, and that the greatness of the land was in its power of reflecting the Reality, and making Its Surface and Depth as one. The coming and going of monks, the unintermittent intensity of prayer and spiritual recollectedness, the atmosphere of luminous vision and celestial benediction, the throbbing of the Indian Heart, spelled to him in most unmistakable language the glory of Bharatavarsha.

One day he journeyed to the site of Sarnath, several miles distant from Benares, to pay his worship to Lord Buddha, who preached here, in the Deer Park, *Dharmachakrapravartana Sutra*, the first of His public gospels, and "beat the drum of immortality in the darkness of the world." But in that time the Stupa or Topa, sacred to the memory of Buddha, and the ruins of the old Buddhist monastery, were still lying covered by a jungled waste. And here the Swami paused long and thought deeply, witnessing in his mind the crumbling power of Time and the ephemeral character of all earthly greatness. And he was impressed with a certain sense of awe and spiritual joy for which he could not account, save being in the place made ineffably holy many centuries ago by the Presence of the Lord and of His monks. And he bowed down in spirit before the Lord.

Surely, the thought of his grandfather and his grandmother

Koviloor Digital Library

came to the Swami in these days. And the thought of his grandmother, and her child—his own father—almost drowned here in very sight of the Holy City, brought various remembrances to his soul. And he visited the temples of Viswanath and Vireshwar and many others, and a strange feeling of overpowering awe seized him when he remembered the vision of his mother long ago. But he was not to lose himself in such thought. He had come for prayer and meditation, and it was to these that he directed his whole attention. And he lived on *mâdhukari bhikshâ*, like other Sadhus, receiving his food with them from the *chhatrams* or establishments which pious devotees of Shiva had founded for the benefit of His Children. Often he dwelt on the Pauranic mythology which associates the *ghâts* with the powerful deeds and great *tapasyâ* and devotion of the Gods. In the evening he sat in silent meditation in the burning-grounds, or upon some projecting portion of the *ghats*, with his eyes gazing in the distance across the river and his mind abstracted from the world of sense. Or he would sing in soft, melodious tones the religious songs which he was accustomed to sing at Dakshineswar or at Cossipur before his Master. Then, perchance, he would think of the Baranagore monastery and his heart would wonder how his Brothers were faring without him. And then he would banish all thoughts of anxiety on their score and crying out with the praying and the bathing thousands, "Hara! Hara! Shambhu! Shiva! Mahadeva!" enter into meditation upon Brahman. Or returning from the Ganges side, his soul would be carried away with ecstasy by the solemn and awe-inspiring worship and *aratrika* in the Temple of Vishwanath.

One morning as he was walking on the road after having visited the temple of the Mother Durga, he was pursued by a troop of monkeys and fled in haste, fearing that they might harm him, for they were often savage. On and on he ran in fear. Just when he was about to be overtaken, he heard a voice call out, "Stop! Always face the brute!" The words

denly brought him to his presence of mind. He turned;

Kovilpoor Digital Library

all his fear was gone, and he stood as if rooted to the spot, gazing full at the maddened troop of monkeys. When he dared defy them, they fled. Surprised at this sudden change of countenance on their part he laughed outright. In the close distance an old Sannyasin was trudging wearily along; the Swami looked at him and saw a fierce glory in his eyes. He greeted him with "Om Namo Narayana!" Smiling, the venerable Sadhu responded with a similar greeting and walked on. It was his voice which had restored the Swami to his senses and drawn out the courage of his soul. And when giving a lecture in America much later in his life, the Swami referred to this incident and pointed to the moral of the story by saying, "So face nature! Face ignorance! Face illusion! Never fly! You remember the story of the king who saw the vision of an enchanted palace, and when he spat on the ground it vanished!"

In Benares he met numerous Pandits and Sannyâsins while staying in the Ashrama of Dwarka Das. This gentleman introduced him to the celebrated Pandit and Bengali writer, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyaya. The Swami and the Pandit held long conversations over the merits of respective Hindu ideals. Both were eloquent, and when they parted the great thinker said, "Wonderful! So much vast experience and insight at such a young age! I am sure he will be a great man!" Here in Benares he visited that Shiva Temple where the famous Trailanga Swami sat in silent meditation. No one knew the age of the Saint, or for how long he had lived in that temple. Some conjectured that he must have been one hundred and fifty years old, some, two hundred years, while others affirmed that he was even more than that. There he was, lost to all outward activity, eating only when any one fed him, all the time absorbed in deepest meditation. It was only in his later days that sometimes he would mentally break the meditative state to answer in writing a question which had been put to him. To him Sri Ramakrishna also went, many years before, and put the question whether Jiva and Brahman were one or two separate entities. And the

Koviloor Digital Library

Trailanga Swami answered by sign to imply that they are two as long as the individual soul sees duality, but ultimately they are merged in one. And the Swami, standing before this great saint, marvelled at the depths of *sadhana* and *tapasya* as manifested by the Indian Sages, and bowed down and took the dust of that Blessed Man's feet.

And from Trailanga Swami he went to the celebrated Swami Bhaskarananda. This man was the embodiment of learning and sat almost nude in his Ashrama. To him the Swami came as on a pilgrimage, and bowed down before him, as younger Sannyâsins do before their elders. A conversation arose between them, and it drifted gradually to the subject of the conquest of *Kâma* and *Kânchana*, or Lust and Gold. This was the *mulamantram* of the Man of Dakshineswar; it was the *mulamantram* of the Order of Sri Ramakrishna. And Bhaskarananda speaking, as it were, ex-cathedra, said, "No one can completely renounce Lust and Gold!" The Swami replied, "What do you say, Sire! There have been many who have done so, for this is the very groundwork of Sannyâsin life and aspirations. And I myself have at least seen *one* who had completely renounced Lust and Gold!" The great Sannyâsin smiled and declared, "You are but a child! What do you know!" Seeing that the argument had become excitedly personal, the Swami became a torrent of pointed wrath. His Guru's life, his own aspiration, the conquest of *Kâma-Kânchana*, the *sine qua non* of the highest realisation were herein attacked, and he rose to the occasion by his brave defence. And those who were with the Swami Bhaskarananda as disciples marvelled. And the great Sannyâsin, before whom men of wealth and position bowed down, marvelled also at his fire and eloquence. Here was one whose like he had never seen. And turning to those who were present he said, "This man has Saraswati in his throat! His mind is like a Great Light!" But the Swami fumed with righteous indignation and left the place.

These were the days of true Sannyâs for the Leader. Many, many experiences occurred of which the tale will never

Kovilloor Digital Library

be told, for he alone knew them. A true wanderer on the face of the earth, he was testing himself as he never did before, finding joy in the freedom of the monk, studying, making observation of all that he saw or heard, digesting every bit of information, making all newly-acquired knowledge his very own. Having seen Benares, having caught its spirit, the *parivrâjaka* tendency came on anew. He must be on the move. He must go elsewhere. Thus one morning he left Benares, and those monks and householders, who had made his acquaintance and who loved him dearly, wondered where the *Swami Vividishananda* had gone. He had left Benares—on his way to another sacred city, the ancient city of Ayodhya, near the modern town of Fyzabad.

And in Ayodhya he pondered long upon the contents of the Ramayana, building the Great Empire of the King-God Rama out of the materials of his imagination and his learning. Years ago, as a child, he had loved Rama and Sita and had delighted in hearing the chantings of the Ramayana. Now he was in Ayodhya itself! He felt that he was on holy ground, and the same feelings that he had in Benares also crept over him here. He was amidst historic interests and historic scenes. "Who would not bear any hardships," he thought, "so long as one can walk upon holy and historic ground." He made the most of his stay in this sacred place, even as he had done in Benares, and saturated his mind with the worship of Rama and listened with rapture to the singing of the names of Sita-Rama by the Sadhus. He begged his food from door to door, taking the Name of Rama with deep devotion. And when he had fulfilled the desires of his heart, dwelling with all love in the meditation upon Sita-Rama, he went on to the renowned city of Lucknow, where he was lost in admiration at the splendours of the late race of kings, the Nawabs of Oudh, and at the city's palaces and mosques. Here, too, he met many wandering monks on the broad highroads that led from and to the city, linking it to great distances in different directions. From Lucknow

Koviloor Digital Library

he reached the beautiful city of Agra of Mogul memories and Mogul greatnesses.

At Agra the Swami lost himself in supreme astonishment at the handicraft and workmanship of Indian artisans. The beauty of the Taj Mahal overpowered him. He almost wept with spiritual joy at its sublime perfection, and he recalled the old, though never trite saying, "The Moguls designed like Titans, but finished like jewellers." Oftentimes during his short stay in this place of royal memories he visited the Taj, seeing it from all angles, in every perspective and in every light and, above all, through his love for India. By moonlight and at dawn he watched its changing beauty and also in the later afternoon, and it spoke to him of the great powers and the unfathomable depths of the human soul. And this was a royal mausoleum, attesting to most royal love and sorrow. He said of the Taj, "Every square inch of this wondrous edifice is worth a whole day's patient observation, and it requires at least six months to make a real study of it!" The Great Fort at Agra also excited his historic imagination. It seemed as if he saw the whole place resurrected with its Emperors and brilliant courts and with all the imperial pageantry. It seemed as if he could see seated on the Great Throne the Mogul Emperors opening their Durbars. He saw the whole Mohammedan era unfolded before his vision and recognised in Akbar the Grand Man of Hindusthan. All his historic knowledge dawned upon him here in a great synthesis; and with the long flow of mental images of India's ancient fame and glory swaying his emotions, he sat down on the roadside leading to the Fort, and the thought intensified that "That which made India great in those days still *lives*." But as he left the city of Agra, he gave one parting glance at the Taj, shining in the distance as a dream in white marble; but by the riverside, near at hand, he also saw the smoke rise high from blazing corpses in the burning-ghat. And the monk in him shuddered, and leaving aside the reveries of forgotten Empires in his yearning for Sri Krishna, he journeyed on through the dusty highroad to Brindaban of holy

Koviloor Digital Library

memories, to pour forth his devotion at the Feet of the God of Love.

But there were many weary miles between. This did not daunt him, however. Exhausted, hungry and thirsty, wandering along in the heat of the day he would reach the shelter of some peaceful village at dusk when the cows come home. And in the coolness, refreshed with the offerings made by the simple villagers he would meditate and perform intense Sadhana. Day after day was thus passed until he reached Brindaban. Before he arrived, when he was some two miles distant from his destination, the Swami noticed a man smoking a *chhillum* of tobacco comfortably by the wayside. He was weary and worn, and so he asked the man to let him have a little smoke. The man almost dropped his *chhillum* with horror, for the Swami, a high-caste man, had asked him, a man of the lowest social status, for a smoke from his *chhillum* of tobacco! "It would defile you, Sire! I am a *bhangi*, a sweeper," he answered. When the Swami heard this his instincts rebelled, and he went on his way. Hardly had he gone half-a-mile when the thought came throbbing in his brain, "What! I who believe in the Oneness of all life, I who have abandoned all ideas of caste and distinction to be so bound down by the spirit of Don't-Touchism! Shame on me that I fell back from smoking the *chhillum* of tobacco from his hands as soon as I heard he was a sweeper! Ages of instinct!" The thought made him so restless that he turned back and found the man still seated there. He sat down beside him and said, "My son, do prepare me a *chhillum* of tobacco." But the man humbly expostulated, "Sire, you are a holy man! I am an outcast!" But the Swami did not listen to his objections and insisted on the tobacco being offered to him in that very *chhillum*. Being cheered up by the Swami and made to feel that he indeed was a brother, the man did as he was asked. Joyous at heart for having overcome a lifelong *smaskâra*, the Swami satisfied his desire and continued his journey. Speaking of Sannyâs once to a disciple, the Swami narrated this incident and said, "There is no other path of life so difficult as that of a San-

Kovilpon Digital Library

nyâsin. Slip your foot ever so little and you fall from a precipice down to the valley beneath and have your limbs broken. One has to examine himself every moment to see if he has gone beyond the reach of the ideas of caste. One has to practise what one preaches. This incident taught me the great lesson that I must never despise anyone, but think of all people as children of the Lord."

Arriving at Brindaban, the Swami rested wheresoever he could find shelter, eating the food offered to Sannyâsins. He recalled all the marvellous things which the Indian mind had said of the beautiful and divine Sri Krishna, the God-Child, He who led the pastoral life in the neighbouring forests, He who was the delight of the Gopis, dancing happily the while He played the flute to the fascination of His devotees. He called up in his mind the wondrous narrative of the birth of the Lord, how He frustrated the murderous intentions of His uncle and enemy, the King Kansa, and how He became in time the First Nation-Maker in India, bringing to the Durbar of the Emperor Yudhishthira all the kings of the land, even the over-lord of Lanka, the present Ceylon, to pay their allegiance to the paramount throne of Indraprastha, the modern Delhi. He remembered how the Lord pronounced the Bhagavad-Gita to the warrior Arjuna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. And then mingling with the numerous pilgrims the Swami made the round of the many temples, and bowed low before the Images of Sri Krishna. He was lifted up in soul by the Spirit of Sri Krishna, whose Presence filled the very air. In Baranagore the Swami learned to love Sri Krishna more and more as he mastered the stanzas of the Gita. Now he recalled Sri Ramakrishna's great love for Sri Krishna of Brindaban. And he thought with sorrow in his heart, "O how I once hated Sri Radha and Sri Krishna !" But now it was different. On the banks of the Jumuna, in the evening quiet, he sang that masterpiece of the songs of Love, which he often repeated later in the monastery at Belur, of how beautiful and queenly Radha came with Her jar to fetch water, but more truly to meet Sri Krishna by the flowing waters in

Koviloor Digital Library

the stillness and the moonlit beauty of the evening. And then, O Her sweet Vanity ! She sings of how She has possessed Herself of Sri Krishna's heart, and Her sweet, happy voice rings out in joyous and triumphant song. But where is Krishna ! There is no sign of Him ! She grows impatient: She weeps, first in petulant impatience, and then in fear and sorrow. No, She does not possess the Great Beloved ! She weeps bitterly, calling with all Her soul, "Krishna ! Krishna ! Where art Thou !" And when She had lost all hope She opened Her eyes, heavy-laden with tears, and then—O wonder of wonders—She sees Sri Krishna at Her side ; and He comforts Her and They both swoon with the ecstasy of Love.

And by the side of that same Jumuna river, the Swami thought of the spiritual symbolism involved. Radha is the purified soul ; Sri Krishna is the Lord. In the moments of first exaltation, in the first hours of the soul's awakening it is all effulgence and beatitude. Then come the hours of test, perhaps the bitter hours of the "Night of the Soul," as the saints have called it. The soul longs for the Beloved, seemingly in vain. And when the sense of separation and of sorrow is deepest, then the Voice comes, "My Beloved, I am always near thee !" and the soul merges with ecstasy in the Nature of the Lord.

Having passed some days in prayer and worship at Brindaban, the Swami desired to visit the villages round about, which were full of holy associations and entrancing interest concerning the legends of the Lord's early life. Once whilst circumambulating the Govardhan Hill, the Swami took the vow that he would not beg his food from anyone, and that he would eat only what was offered to him without his asking. During the first day he became exceedingly hungry at noon-time. To add to his discomfort, a heavy rain began to fall. He grew faint with hunger and with much walking, but still he journeyed on and on, without asking for food. In his heart was Sri Krishna. Suddenly he heard some one calling him from behind, but he did not answer. Nearer and nearer

Koviloor Digital Library

came the voice, that of a devotee, calling out that he had brought food for him. The Swami began to run as fast as he could, to *test* this apparent act of Providence. The man also running after him for nearly a mile overtook him and insisted that he accept the food. That done, he said nothing and thereafter disappeared behind the forest trees. His mind filled with the ecstasy of devotion at this miraculous act of the Lord, the Swami burst into tears, crying out, "Blessed be Sri Radha ! Blessed be Sri Krishna !" There in the wilderness the Lord had taken care of His devotee ! Who knows that He had not manifested Himself unto him in that form !

From Govardhana he came to the Radhakunda, a place held as sacred in the thought of the Vaishnavas because of its association with Radha, the Queen of the Lord's Own Soul. At this time he had only the *kaupina*, or a narrow strip of cloth about his loins, and having no second one to wear after his bath he took this off, washed it and left it on the bank to dry, before entering the water. When he came out, he found to his surprise that his *kaupina* was gone ! Where could it be ! The wind could not have blown it away ! He grew as nervous as a child ; and then, looking up, he saw a monkey sitting in a tree holding the cloth with a triumphant expression on his face. He approached the tree and said, "Brother monkey, do give me my *kaupina* !" but the monkey only made faces and did not throw down the cloth. Wounded in heart against Radha, the Swami complained to Her, as a child, holding Her responsible, She being the presiding deity of the place. He grew full of *abhimâna*, or righteous anger which proceeds from love towards the loved one. He vowed, then and there, that he would go into the inmost recesses of the forest and starve himself. And with this determination he strolled beneath the trees, absorbed in deep thought. As he went on, having not even a single earthly possession, he heard a voice calling to him, but he paid no heed to it. Presently a man came up, out of breath from running after him, with food and with a new *gerrua* cloth, and

Koviloor Digital Library

begged him to kindly accept them. The Swami was astounded. What did all this mean! It seemed like a miracle! "Radha! Radha!" he cried out and retraced his steps to the sacred tank. What was his surprise to find his *kaupina* lying on the very spot where he himself had put it to dry before entering the water!

Such incidents proved to the Swami that he was beloved of the Lord and that He protected him wheresoever he was. He redoubled his devotions to the Lord, and in the silence of his soul he gave his whole heart to Him.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXIV

THE FIRST DISCIPLE.

Life is indeed strange, and the events of life incorporate some purpose; and the relationships one makes, besides the gratification of sentiment, have a deeper motive, unknown perhaps to the conscious mind but which time makes manifest. In other words, relationships are real only in so far as they make for growth, and where there is such a relationship, the soul *attracts* its own; its *own* shall come to it. If this is true in a purely personal sense, how much more so is it true in the instance of a Master and his Disciple! When the latter is ready the Guru *must* come. Such is the belief in Hindusthan. And he who was to be known as the Swami Vivekananda *had* to come to Hathras, for his first disciple awaited him in that town. At least, such was the outcome of the subliminal direction, though the conscious mind, thinking perhaps to journey on to Kedar-Badri, purposed waiting only a few hours at the railway-junction.

The Swami was seen last in Brindaban, his thought and soul devoted to the ideals and worship of Radha and Krishna. The thought came to his mind one morning that he must leave the holy city and journey onwards in the direction of the Himalayas. But the thought was only the means to throw him off from Brindaban. He was not as yet to see the Eternal Snows, where in the Silence Shiva dwells. There seemed to have been an underlying purpose in all his movements, and that was to find out his mission and its contents, and to find sincere souls who would be workers in the cause. But the Swami was not concerned with this at present. The conscious mind was rejoicing in its desire to dive deep into meditation at Badri-Narayan in the wilds of the Himalayas, but the Self in him was being called by a soul which sought the Light. So, the next vision of him is, seated in a

Kailash Digital Library

secluded corner of the Hathras railway-station, seeming to be rather wearied and in want of food.

The station-master, Sarat Chandra Gupta, was a remarkable character, a Bengali who grew up amongst the Mohammedans of Jaunpur and spoke Hindusthani and Urdu with more fluency than his mother-tongue. His whole character is summed up in three words,—sweetness, sincerity and manliness. When Sarat Gupta was passing along in the performance of his duty, his eyes caught the figure of a monk, seated cross-legged on the ground in the station-compound. He thought, "O here is a Sadhu ! He has the most wonderful countenance I have ever seen !" He was greatly delighted to see him. Almost instantly he took the dust of the monk's feet, and begged him to come into his room and rest. First of all he said, "Swamiji, you are hungry." "Yes, I am," came the quiet response. "All right, what will you have ?" The monk replied, "Bring me anything !" In a short time Sarat Gupta had exhausted all the resources of the station in procuring a feast for the Swami, who had seen but the simplest food for many weeks, and very little of that too. He ate the food with a relish as he was well nigh famished, and as it was offered by a devotee with love and spiritual intent.

When the tasks of the day were over for the station-master, he spent the time with the monk, "whose eyes attracted" him "beyond measure". It was a case of love at first sight, so to say. He begged him to stay in Hathras for some days. But almost his first words were, "Sire, teach me wisdom!" Then the monk made answer with a song in which the Loved One speaking to the Lover says, "If you desire to possess My Love, go and cover your beautiful face with ashes ! Go and renounce all and come to me !" Immediately, the station-master replied, "Swamiji, I am at your service ! I am ready to renounce everything to follow you !" The monk was astonished beyond words. He could not trust his senses. This was renunciation in truth ! And O the manliness of him !

One day the station-master inquired of the wanderer, "You seem sad, Swamiji. Why ?" The monk made answer, "My

Kovilpur Digital Library

dear child, I have a great mission to fulfil, and I am despairing because of the smallness of my capacity. I have an injunction from my Guru Maharaj to carry out and that is, to do His Work, And as the days pass by, I am finding it to be nothing less than the Regeneration of the Motherland. Spirituality has fallen to a very low ebb and starvation stalks the land. India must become dynamic and effect the conquest of the world through her *Spirituality*." The eyes of the monk were afire as he spoke, and his face was lighted up by a strange beauty ; and the heart of Sarat Gupta, a man amongst men, was melted by a flow of feeling he had never known before. He listened as though spell-bound. Hardly had the words been uttered than he spoke with all the ardour of his soul, "Here I am, Swamiji ! What do you want me to do ?" The monk desiring to test the depth of the man said interrogatively, "Are you prepared to take up the begging-bowl and *kamandalu* and work for this Great Cause ? Can you beg from door to door ? Can you live the life of renunciation ?" "Yes," came forth the bold reply, and then the monk gathering together his few articles of travel, rose to his feet to be followed by Sarat Gupta whithersoever he chose to lead him. From the very beginning the Swami *knew* what was to come. Sarat Gupta seemed to his fellows to have suddenly gone mad, spiritually speaking. They wondered what had brought on the transformation in the hitherto Bohemian nature of the station-master.

Soon after his arrival at Hathras, however, the Swami was made aware of one Brojen Babu in the course of conversation with the station-master, and thinking that he had known him in Calcutta, he went to his residence. The gentleman recognising him at once greeted him heartily and insisted that he must stay at least several days with him. The Swami consented, promising to come and live with Sarat Gupta in a few days. Whilst in the house of Brojen Babu, the whole Bengalitola of the town poured in upon the Swami. Prior to his advent, there had been some differences amongst the resident Bengalis, but all these were now laid aside in

their longing to come and hear the Sannyâsin. The Swami spoke of religion and of the Motherland with such fervour and such intensity that most of the visitors spent hours in the house of Brojen Babu. During these few days the Swami often visited the quarters of Sarat Gupta and his friend, one Notukrishna. These two became more and more attached to him and earnestly begged him to be their guest. He consented and came to live with them. Notukrishna writes in a letter reminiscent of those days:—

"Thus we with others spent the most blessed days of our lives in constant spiritual conversation with him. By the power of his holy company, the sectarian quarrels and mutual ill-feeling between the different factions of the Bengalis vanished. Those who entertained the pride of age or of high position in society, used to come and sit like children before the young monk, forsaking their conceit of knowledge and position, and ask him questions on religious matters. The evening was usually spent in music, and the many gentlemen who assembled were simply charmed with his sweet voice and sat for hours as if spell-bound. The more they heard him the more the thirst of hearing him grew in their soul!"

Thus many days were spent at the Gupta-house, the Swami speaking to the groups of devotees and admirers and they listened to him becoming the disciples of his thought.

Then, one morning it occurred to the Swami to leave Hathras. He said, "I cannot stay here longer. I am a Sannyâsin and should never remain long in any one place. Besides, I am feeling a sort of attachment for all of you. And I must not fall into bondage of *any* sort." The hearers of the monk's resolve attempted to dissuade him, but he only said, "Do not press me!" Finding the Swami irrevocably resolved to set out for other scenes, Sarat Gupta was plunged in grief. In the short space of time during which he had come to know him, his love for him had grown ungovernable. His heart was lost. Indeed, the young man realised in the Swami the ideal of his dreams; he saw incarnate in him the abstract ideal of love with which Sufi literature is filled, for the station-master of Hathras, in the days of his life at Jaunpur, had saturated his mind with Sufism through the help of his Mohammedan friends. When Sarat Gupta heard of the Swami's resolve

Kovilloor Digital Library

he said, "Swamiji, make me your disciple!" The monk replied, "Why! Do not think that everything in the life of spirituality will be gained by becoming my disciple. Remember that God is in everything, and then *whatever* you do will make for your progress. I shall come and be with you now and then. At present I must be going to the Himalayas!"

It was strange how the Swami, who was to have hundreds of disciples in later life, was reluctant to accept any in the beginning. It seems that he felt at that time a great sense of humility at being regarded as the Guru by any human soul. He was likewise anxious to reach a further spiritual development and much more realisation before assuming such a grave responsibility. In these days it was only when someone pressed him insistently that he consented to initiate him. So when Sarat Gupta begged him to accept him as a disciple he had answered in an indefinite way. But the man was not to be put off in this fashion. He repeated his entreaty time and again, until at length he spoke out, "Swamiji, say what you will, wheresoever you will go I shall follow you!" Seeing his determination and fathoming his sincerity, the monk said, in a manner as though half-amused and yet putting his whole soul into the words, "Can you really follow me?" Being assured in the affirmative he commanded, "Then take my begging-bowl and go and beg our food from the porters of the station." No sooner was the order given than the station-master went a-begging from his own underlings. Having collected some food he brought it to the monk, who blessed him heartily.

With the permission of his parents Sarat Gupta resigned his post and went on with the Swami to Hrishikesh, the picturesque retreat of Sadhus at the foot of the Himalayas. But the journey proved too strenuous for the disciple. Accustomed to much comfort he found that the Sannyâsin life was that of constant and terrible Sadhana, for every moment was a moment of uncertainty and every day they met with severe hardships. On and on they had wandered, crossing many streams, begging on their way as other Sadhus. "Once in

Kavikoor Digital Library

our wanderings in the outlying districts of the Himalayas, said the disciple, to whom the name Sadananda had been given, "I was ill and fainted with hunger and thirst. The Swami carried me on his shoulders for several miles, and thus undoubtedly saved me from certain death. On another occasion, like a *syce* he led the horse, which some one had kindly lent us for the journey, across a mountain river which was very dangerous to ford, being extremely swift, and slippery at the bottom. It seemed not at all unlikely at one or two moments that we would be carried down the stream. He risked his life several times for my sake. How can I describe him, friends, except by the word *love*, Love, LOVE! When I became exceedingly ill he carried my personal belongings, including my *shoes*, upon his head!" In India, such an act as carrying another's shoes upon the head is only done by a *shishya* for his *guru* as a mark of the deepest respect and love. Therefore, it is not strange that in later life the Swami Sadananda should say, "When once feeling myself forlorn I asked him if he was going to give me up, he answered with a sweet severity, 'Fool, do you not remember that I carried your *shoes* upon my head!" Still another time, whilst the Swami and his disciple were wandering through the jungles of those parts, they came across some bleached human bones, with bits of rotten *gerrua* lying here and there. "See, Sadananda," said the Swami. "Here a tiger has devoured a Sannyâsin! Are you afraid?" The disciple promptly replied, "Not with you, Swamiji!" Even in this early time, when he was the unknown *Sadhu*, one witnesses the force of character and the power to infuse inspiration in others, which were the Swami's main qualities. One sees how he could instil into his disciples fearlessness and stir up their best energies to spiritual perseverance. From the very beginning, he was to all of his disciples the "Master"!

At Hrishikesh the Swami and his disciple lived like other *Sadhus*. They met many wanderers like themselves, monks from the United Provinces and from Bengal and the Punjab, and some from Madras and the Bombay side. The Swami

Kovilpor Digital Library

was in his element here, where the very atmosphere breathed monasticism, the place which every monk regards as the "home" of begging friars. The Swami and his disciple dwelt there in an atmosphere of intense prayer and meditation. The disciple was constantly in the presence of his Master, serving him as *shishyas* serve their *gurus*. Foot-hills were all about, but they longed to ascend the mighty peaks of the Himalayas which were in the distance ; in fact, they were making preparations. They heard the talk of many monks who were joyfully anticipating to make the trip to Kedar-Badri during the next summer, where the cold winds blow and where the Lord dwells upon the mountain-tops. But at this juncture the monk Sadananda fell seriouslyl ill, and there was no other course but to take him to Hathras. The Swami loved the music of the falling, whirling waters of the Ganges in the neighbourhood of Hrishikesh. They seemed to him roaring like thunder the note of "Hara! Hara! Vyom! Vyom!" and spoke to him of the great freedom of monastic life. He loved the outlines of the hills as the morning or the evening shadows fell upon them. But with his disciple ill, he was bound to give up the Kedar-Badri trip and even his life of *tapasya* in Hrishikesh.

Thus Guru and disciple journeyed back to Hathras, where they were made welcome guests. But here the Swami himself fell ill. Both disciple and master had had a strenuous time of it, and were now suffering from weakness and the malarial fever contracted in Hrishikesh. Somehow the monks in Baranagore, Calcutta, heard of this. It was likely that one of the Bengali residents of Hathras who had heard the Swami speak of Sri Ramakrishna and of the Baranagore Math had written to the Brothers of the Leader's illness. For the Swami was surprised to receive a letter from his *gurubhais*, urging him to return as soon as possible. They insisted that there were many pressing circumstances which required his presence. There were imperative reasons for his return. Hearing this, the Swami felt he must go down to Calcutta, and took leave of his disciple at Hathras urging him to come,

Kovilloor Digital Library

as soon as he was well, to the Baranagore monastery. He himself in spite of his weakness went on to Calcutta. When the monk Sadananda found that he was sufficiently recuperated at the end of several months, he joined his master in the monastery. Here he was received with open arms by the monks and admitted into their hearts and into their life as one of them. Here he found the heaven-world of his spiritual dreams and rejoiced in performing acts of service for the brethren.

When the Leader reached Baranagore the monks were radiant with happiness, though looking upon his emaciated face their hearts were sad. "He has come back!" they said, repeating and repeating the thought the whole day long. They sent the joyous news to the householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta that Noren was back amongst them. Of course all the monks were not present, as quite a number had gone off on pilgrimage. But those who were in Baranagore, and the *bhaktas* and the householder disciples of the Master made the Leader's return a great festival and days were spent in happy conversation. But before all else, they begged the Leader to take a good rest as he seemed to have become extremely thin and weak through leading the life of *sadhana* as the *parivrâjaka*, or itinerant monk. Notwithstanding that, there was the look of a lion in his eyes.

Days succeeded days, the Swami steadily improving in health and attending the hours of worship and prayer in the chapel where the Relics of Sri Ramakrishna lay. Then the Swami would sing for hours and would recite the story of his long journeys on foot in rain and shine, the monks "dragging his experiences from his memory." And he told them of his realisations in Benares, of his sojourn at Ayodhya and Lucknow, of his sufferings and joys in Agra when he saw the palatial ruins of the Mogul Empire; and then he told of his journey to Brindaban, and in general, of the many interesting places and people that he had seen in the course of his travels. And then he spoke of Hathras and of Hrishikesh, of his first disciple, of his longing

Koviloor Digital Library

for the Himalayas. And then, indeed, he spoke of his determination of again leaving the monastery and making the Northern Tirtha sometime soon. But the monks expostulated, saying, "Noren, you must have rest! Do not think of leaving for some time yet. Let us live the life as we did succeeding the Master's Nirvana." The Swami remained silent. But as the days passed by, a renewed restlessness seized him and he was meditating his departure, though he said nothing of this until a few days before he decided to go. The very day of his leaving, however, the Swami Sadananda unexpectedly arrived from Hathras. This immediately changed the Leader's plans. He thought, "How can I go now? I have to postpone my departure at least for a time."

The Brothers were delighted to have their beloved Noren with them for sometime longer. The old days seemed to have come back. The Leader was his old self again and instilled into his Brothers all the ideas he had gathered as the *parivrâjaka*. He broadened their perspective, instructing them for days and days and making them interested in the spiritual regeneration of the nation. He tried to eradicate their provincial consciousness and make them think of all the separate parts of Hindusthan as composing an indivisible unit. And the spirit of this unit, he said, was that of the Vedas and the Upanishads, and its strength, the supersensuous vision and the most wonderful outlook upon life that the human mind and heart had ever conceived. *In Ramakrishna India would be one*, he said. And this particular training of mind made them capable of bridging the barriers that separate one province or one caste from another. For in truth, they were to cross the boundary line which modern Hinduism, in its more rigid orthodoxy, had determined as the immovable barrier between one caste and another, between one nation and another.

Because of the training under the Leader in these days, the monks learnt the value of making a study of the problems with which the nation found itself confronted. Personally,

Kovilloor Digital Library

his experiences in Benares, Ayodhya and Brindâban, and in Lucknow and Agra had, in a particular sense, made him realise the civilisation of Hindusthan to be spiritual, productive and sublime, and Asiatic throughout. They made him realise that the truism, "Asia is One" expressed itself most emphatically here in India where, beneath a most complex diversity of race and type, a most marvellous basis of unity was evident everywhere. India was one in pilgrimage and in the spiritual ideals, in the fundamentals of social custom and in the universal perspective of Sanskrit learning and culture. And the Leader showed his brother-monks how ideals and ideas travel, so that Devi-worship takes in the length and breadth of the land from Kashmir and Nepal to Cape Comorin from Assam to Bombay. He showed them how the Shiva of Amarnath and Pashupatinath of Nepal and the Shiva of Tarakeswar and Benares and the Shiva of Rameswaram are One, and he would go on and on until the Unity and Unison of Indian thought and aspiration became facts in the spiritual perspective of this group of monks, and they all determined that their lives should be a constant dedication to the task of realising and of teaching the common basis of Hinduism and the Oneness of the Faith. Days upon days passed in this manner until the Baranagore monastery resembled a religious university, in which the special branches of philosophy and sociology and history and nationalism became all interblended in one united heart-throbbing of spiritual understanding, and the monks became inspired with the glory of the Sanatana Dharma. And the Leader would make the comparison between the Eastern and the Western culture of the world, showing how physical ideas underlay the whole fabric of Western civilisation and how spiritual ideas were at the bottom of Hindu thought and life and custom. This was the time of a tremendous awakening of the spirit for the monks. No wonder that they knew the genius of Vivekananda years before his Western fame. He was, to these Children of Sri Ramakrishna, the Spirit Incarnate of Hinduism, the eloquent spokesman of its Meaning and its Message.

Koviloor Digital Library

Thus, in fact, the Leader's very *parivrâjaka* experiences made him all the more fit to be the organiser of the Order. His wanderings, his being carried on the wings of his own spiritual inclination, made him the more fit to educate his *gurubhâis* into the understanding of the Message of the Master, which was to the Swami's mind, nothing less than the spiritual regeneration of the Motherland. That which the monks received they meditated upon in its religious significance, making their illumination concerning the Divine brighter and brighter. And they hoped that the Motherland might revive, ever rising higher and higher in the scale of social and spiritual betterment, and constantly uniting in its rise the races of India into One Nation and the provinces into one Sociological Whole, maintaining the Dharma at all costs.

Having fulfilled this particular phase of his mission, so far as the monks were concerned, the Swami left the monastery again. One day he was gone, having turned his steps to Pavhari Baba, the Holy Man of Ghazipur.

Kpviloor Digital Library

LXV

RAMAKRISHNA OR PAVHARI BABA ?

What a wonderful life was that which Pavhari Baba lived in Ghazipur! Keshub Chandra Sen, in his searching throughout India for Mahapurushas, heard of this Yogi as one possessed of most exalted wisdom, and visited him. And the Swami, hearing of him in the Garden of Dakshineswar had gone from Cossipur to see him. And it is well remembered how he was impressed and how the Saint, hearing that he was a disciple of Paramahamsadeva welcomed him cordially, and pointed out to him the likeness of the Master which he kept in his meditation cell. And Pavhari Baba had said at that time, "He is an Avatâra!" The experience which the Swami had at Ghazipur remained with him as a deep impression and as a spiritual possession. Often since the departure of the Master he had thought of sojourning again in the holy company of the Saint of Ghazipur.

And who was Pavhari Baba? it is asked. Born of Brâhmana parents in a village near Benares, he went in his boyhood to Ghazipur where under the training of his uncle, a lifelong Brahmacharin, he became versed in Vyâkarana and Nyâya and in the theology of the Ramanuja sect. His uncle dying, he resolved "to supply the gap with a vision that can never change,"—and possessed with the determination of finding the Reality, he wandered throughout the land, in the course of which he gained a fair knowledge of Dravidian languages and old Bengali. At length he became initiated into the mysteries of Yoga on the top of Mount Girnar in Kathiawad, holy both to the Hindu and the Buddhist devotees, and at whose base stands the first deciphered edict of the Emperor Asoka. From the Mount of Girnar he journeyed to Benares, where he met a great Sannyâsin, who had made a hole dug into the high bank of the Ganges his

Koviloor Digital Library

hermitage. Here in Benares, he mastered the Advaita Vedanta system, and then travelled on for many years studying and performing much ascetic discipline. Finally he came to his old home, Ghazipur, where he himself dug a hermitage in the ground, by the river's bank, and remained there for hours at a time in prolonged meditation, spending the nights across the river in austere practices. His daily diet consisted of a handful of bitter Nimba leaves or a few pods of red pepper only. He held all work to be "worshipping others;" and he would often give the food he cooked, after offering it to his *Ishtam*, to the poor or to some wandering monks, personally refusing to eat. So spare was his diet that men called him Pavhari Baba, which means "The Air-eating Father." As time went on, he remained more and more in his cave for days and months together, until people wondered upon what he lived, and thought he must be dead. The Baba however emerged after a long time. When not absorbed in meditation he would come up in a room above the entrance to his cave and would receive visitors. Later on he did not show himself to anyone. Finally, one morning, smelling the odour of burning flesh and seeing volumes of smoke rising from the apertures of his cell, his devotees found that he had offered himself as a holocaust to the Lord, whilst his spirit soared into the blessedness of Samâdhi.

Of this Saint, it is said that, when once a thief entered his hermitage to steal and then dropped the stolen goods on seeing him, he ran after the thief with the bundle left behind. Overtaking the man, the Saint fell upon his knees and with tears in his eyes begged the thief's pardon for having disturbed him by intruding, and insisted that he accept the stolen goods, saying, "They are yours! They are yours! Your need is greater than mine!" And at another time, being bitten by a cobra he said on reviving that the cobra was "a Messenger from my Beloved!" All physical illness was to him but "a Messenger from the Beloved!" He was as great a Jnâni as a Bhakta.

No wonder then that the Swami was anxious to renew

Kavitha Digital Library

his acquaintance with the Saint. How inspiring was Pavhari Baba's life! His very presence breathed holiness, and the Swami himself admitted that he owed a deep debt of gratitude to the Saint, and spoke of him as one of the greatest masters he had loved and served. To use the Swami's own words concerning the Yogi: "His voice was the sweetest we have ever heard. For the last ten years or more of his life, he had withdrawn himself entirely from the gaze of mankind. A few potatoes and a little butter were placed before the door of his room, and sometime during the night these were taken in when he was living above ground and was not in Samâdhi. When inside his cave, he did not require even these"....."One of his great peculiarities was his entire absorption at the time in the task in hand, however trivial. The same amount of care and attention were bestowed in cleansing a copper pot as in the worship of Raghunathji, he himself being the best example of the secret he once told us of work, 'The *means* should be loved and served as if it were the *end* itself!'" He was possessed of a wonderful humility which found expression in a beautiful sentence which he used to quote from the sacred Scriptures, "O King, the Lord is the wealth of those who have nothing,—yes, of those who have thrown away all desires of possession, even that of one's own soul!"

When living in the monastery at Baranagore, the Swami felt as if called to Ghazipur. So with all the memories of what he had heard of this Saint and of his own personal experience of him in a former time, the Swami arrived in Ghazipur, and amongst the first sayings which the Saint told him was, "In the kingdom of the mind, when Sumeru, the celestial mountain, and its opposite, the Kumeru, meet together, then the life of the Spirit begins. That is to say, when heaven and hell and all ideas of duality vanish, then comes the Knowledge of Brahman!"

The Swami stopped with Rai Gagan Chandra Roy Bahadoor of the place, whom he had met on the former occasion when he visited Ghazipur. In fact, it was this gentle-

Koviloor Digital Library

man who had introduced him to the Saint. At his house many persons crowded to hear and see the Swami whom they called "Babaji". Music and *sankirtan* parties were held almost every Sunday and many conversations occurred concerning social reform, the Swami giving forth his views in the words : "Not with violent denunciation, nor with all-sweeping criticism must reform be carried on, but with infinite love and infinite patience and through the spread of education which will bring about a natural growth from *within.* And the education must be *from the Hindu point of view* and consist of a justified glorification and expansion and *conscious understanding* of the ideals in Hinduism, for, remember, Hinduism is *not a mistake* ! Dive deep and you will fathom its greatness ! Do not be too easily swayed by the glamour of foreign culture and customs ! *Study* the Motherland ! Find out for yourselves the underlying purpose of your race and its life-impulse ! There is no sadder condition in the history of this land than that which has befallen us to-day, when we are hypnotised by allowing ourselves to think, even for one single moment, that India is backward in the vision of ideals. This is the real and heart-rending poverty which stalks the land, the fact that we have lost sight of the spiritual standards of our civilisation. *When we become self-conscious, all our problems will be solved !*"

The Swami spoke these things to his admirers ; and following upon the religious exercises, which he performed in the house of his host, he would go to the cave of Pavhari Baba and hear his words of wisdom. Conversations would arise on Bhakti and Vedantism, and on the latter subject they would become so exceedingly abstruse that others who were present could not follow them.

The contents of their talk were the interrelationship of the most profound metaphysics of the different philosophical systems of Hinduism, the path of *yoga* by which the Goal or Brahman is to be attained through the *expansion of personality* and the intensification of spiritual desires, the means of spiritual growth and the objective methods whereby

Koviloor Digital Library

to bring the far-fetchedness of the abstract Idea of Brahman to bear upon the facts of daily life. By frequent intercourse and illuminating conversations on the highest truths, the Swami's admiration for the Baba grew more and more. He weighed the words of wisdom which flowed constantly from the lips of the great man reconciling many conflicting points of view, and gained a deep insight into the heart of many spiritual verities. The Swami speaking of the Baba in later times said, that he was one who denied "the greater potentiality of one moment over another,—every moment in eternity being equal to every other, and who insisted on seeing the truths of Religion face to face, *now* and *here*, not waiting for death." And when the Swami asked him why he did not come out into the world and teach, the Saint made answer with another query, "Do you think that physical help is the only help possible? Is it not possible that one mind can help other minds, even without the activity of the body?" These luminous remarks made the Swami look with reverence upon the Baba, regarding him as a Mahapurusha. And the Saint entertained a deep affection for him which the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna reciprocated. Swamiji spoke to others of the happiness he enjoyed in the company of Pavhari Baba, and many people in Ghazipur thought that he was going to stay with them for many days. But one morning to the surprise of everyone he was gone. Something forced him forth, some powerful impulse within the very depths of his nature, and following his inclination in the way he would an *Adesha*, or a Command from the Lord, he returned to the monastery at Baranagore, "his face shining like a Knower of Brahman."

Again there was rejoicing amongst the Children of Sri Ramakrishna, and the Leader told the monks about the greatness of Pavhari Baba, narrating to them all that he had learned and realised in Ghazipur. He was full of the spirit of Pavhari Baba, and would insist upon making the means as valuable as the end itself, thus transforming the whole of life into a spiritual process and developing the concentration of mind upon the goal in doing all the things of daily life.

Kovilpor Digital Library

And then, by way of contrast, the Swami would point out the unparalleled greatness of Sri Ramakrishna, saying that volumes could be written upon each single utterance of his soul. A householder devotee who was present when the Swami made this statement, doubted, saying, "How can that be, Swamiji ! Can you explain ?" "Yes," came the answer. "Choose any saying and I will prove to you how it is possible !" Then the disciple quoted the Master's parable of the monk, the elephant and the elephant-driver, which he used to tell in explaining the sense in which "All is to be looked upon as God." The parable reads, "The Guru said, 'everything that exists is God.' The pupil understood this literally, but not in the right spirit. While he was passing through the street he met an elephant. The driver, the *mâhout*, shouted aloud from his high place, 'Move away ! Move away !' The pupil argued in his mind, 'Why should I move away ? I am God ; so is the elephant, God ; what fear has God of Himself ?' Thinking thus, he did not move from the path. At last the elephant took him up in its trunk and dashed him aside. He was hurt severely and going back to his master complained of the sad plight he had come to in putting his teaching into practice. When he related the whole adventure, the master said, 'All right, my son ! You are God ; the elephant is God, also ; but when God in the shape of the elephant-driver was warning you from above, why did you not pay heed to his words ?' "

For three consecutive days the Swami expatiated upon this utterance of Sri Ramakrishna, showing how amongst the scholars, philosophers and theologians, both in the East and the West, a great divergence of opinion had been raging between the dualistic and monistic systems in philosophy, and between the theory of Free-will and that of Destiny, and also between personal exertion for the attainment of God and God's Will and Grace, and how the parable of the Master wonderfully reconciled all the points of difference and solved the problems most satisfactorily. On and on he went, showing how in the Western world the ideas of Divine Rights

Kovilloor Digital Library

and the sense of Privilege alternately swayed between the rulers and the people, how sometimes points of reconciliation were arrived at in the social disturbances by the recognition on the part of both of the Righteousness and Divinity of either cause. The disciple listened with wonderment while the Swami proceeded, illustrating his generalisations by actual historic happenings and by pitching one method of logical treatment against the other. And the Swami continued, pointing out how in the West the ideal of Divine Rights was gradually coming to be recognised as the property of all, irrespective of class distinctions, and that thus Western civilisation, as a whole, was arriving at the perception of the Divinity of Nature and that Privilege which tended towards sameness, and of the Unity underlying all complex social forms and social differences, thus introducing in a pragmatic way the doctrine of the Divinity of Human Nature and the Brotherhood of Man. And then he spoke for hours upon the necessity of introducing those ideas with which the West had so successfully experimented, into his native land. Finally, the man was convinced of the truth of the Leader's remarks and both he and the monks were amazed at the depth and greatness of his intellect.

Many days passed in such ardent attitudes of soul in interpreting the fullest scope of the teachings of the Master. Then, when one least expected it, there came the sudden news to the monks that the Swami Yogananda was seriously ill at Allahabad. At once the Swami left Calcutta with several of the Brothers to nurse him, amongst these being the Swami Sadananda. It was a wonderful time that was spent in Allahabad. Yogananda's illness seemed as if purposed by the Master for the spreading of his Gospel in that city. And the monks engendered a great wave of spiritual fire about the sick bed of their *gurubhâi*. Days and nights were passed in *fermenting*, as they say, and the Vivekachudamani obsessed all their thought for quite a time. The Leader was in his element and rose to great spiritual occasions, preaching and teaching constantly to the many people who came to be

Koviloor Digital Library

instructed and inspired, whilst the other monks nursed their *gurubhâi*. And Swamiji, too, took his turn, remaining awake whole nights, spending the time in loving service and devotion. Whilst in Allahabad the Swami saw a great Mohammedan fakir, a Mahapurusha, "whose every line and curve told that he was a Paramahamsa," and the Leader would quote Sankara, saying,

"Sometimes naked, sometimes mad,
Now a scholar, now as a fool,
Now as a rebel, now as a saint,
Thus they appear on earth,
The Paramahamsas."

There were times when the monks grew anxious, fearing lest Yogananda might fare worse, but after a time he improved and then, by twos and threes, the monks returned to Calcutta, the Leader and the Swami Niranjanananda, stopping at Benares on the way. And now in Allahabad and in Benares, in Brindâban and in Kankhal, the Swami's work and spirit have been made manifest in the founding and the growth of monasteries and Shevâshramas, the spirit of which had its root in this time of religious enthusiasm and joyous asceticism. After the return from Allahabad the Swami remained with the monks in the Baranagore monastery, except for a short wandering, here and there, to villages in the neighbouring districts.

Again after a time the call came to Ghazipur! The Swami's soul was now passing through a strange tempest. The Leader felt as though he himself was in need of inspiration. He had been impressed deeply with Pavhari Baba. He knew of none other except Sri Ramakrishna who could help him; and so, in the latter part of January, 1890, the Leader broke away again from the monastery. At Ghazipur he passed some time with Babu Satish Chandra Mukherjee. During these days he again met many persons; some had been known to him before, others not. Through Rai Gagan Chandra Roy Bahadoor he met Mr. Ross, a Government official, who asked him many penetrating questions about the Hindu festivals,

Koviloor Digital Library

mentioning in particular those of *Holi* and the *Ramlila;* and wanted to know if there was any religious sanction for the practices associated with them. He also questioned the Swami concerning many Hindu social customs. The Swami rose to his very highest moods. The spirit of the preacher in him was aroused and he spoke with power and with luminous insight, showing the relationship between Nature-worship and hero-worship and religious growth. He also illustrated to the astonished European scholar the spiritual ideas at the bottom of each social custom until the gentleman was convinced of the wonder of the Sanatana Dharma, recognising in it a vastness of the spiritual perspective, hitherto not even dreamed of by him. Mr. Ross introduced the learned Sannyâsin to Mr. Pennington, the District Judge. This gentleman literally drew the Swami out, making him pour forth all his prophetic knowledge of the Revival of Hinduism and the tendency of the Modern Transition in India ; and he spoke upon the scientific basis of *Yoga* and the ideals of ascetic discipline of the Hindu Sannyâsins and many other subjects, leading the minds of his hearers into the analytical criticism of, and the sanction of modern psychology to, the powers of human faculty as awakened and expressed by the yogis.

Then with still another European gentleman, Colonel Rivett-Carnac, the Swami had a lengthy discussion upon Vedantism. The arguments were as regards the statement of Vedanta Ideals, and also as regards their practicability in daily human life. The Swami here revealed his extraordinary genius of transcending the ordinary bounds of metaphysics and made the listener aware of the world of effort and reconciliation that exists, in the way of test and suffering, and vision and exalted character, passing through which, in the daily experience of living and striving, the whole of life is set in the spiritual perspective and at length the soul cries out, "All this is God! All this is divine! The lowest and the highest are the manifestations of Infinite Perfection and the Goal of all Creation is the attainment of Brahman! Personal development and cosmic evolution are the means, and the inspiring

Kovilpur Digital Library

forces are both pain and pleasure, both good and evil, both light and darkness, and both the creative and the destructive aspects of Reality !" In this glowing vision all finiteness dies out, said the Swami. Only the Infinite and Eternal are manifest, and *here* and *now*, in spite of finiteness and of time. Here and hereafter are only names, the Reality IS, irrespective of the limitations of space and time. And that which perceives Reality is the awakened spiritualised consciousness, which neither time nor space can circumscribe.

The speaker grew radiant. All his monasticism, all his asceticism, all his vision, insight, power and personality came out, and he became Vedantism Incarnate as it were, to the astonished Westerner. Then he spoke of the relationship between this august Ideal and the life of the people, showing that in the very manner in which the Hindus eat, dress, marry, rear their children, and look upon the dead body, is a constant following of methods whereby the body-idea is overcome and the Pure Spirit is worshipped and realised. And then the Swami waxed more and more eloquent, showing to the European mind the idea of the Gods in Hinduism as personified qualities of the Pure Spirit and as radiant visions, from different angles, of the All-embracing Truth. And he insisted that, so long as man is limited, so long as he cannot embrace the whole Truth, these sub-Ideas are emphatically essential. They are necessary spiritual elements in the expansion and deification of consciousness. The mental images of the Gods, he pointed out, are real both in themselves and as representing the Ideas ; and after all, religion, he continued, must be seen in the light of a spiritual psychology, if its comprehensive character and influence is to be connoted. For religion is a phenomenon of consciousness ; it is its growth, its constant attenuation in the direction of Pure Spirit. So all religions are true, some leading to higher truths than others ; so all symbols are necessary ; for the stages of mental development and spiritual perception are innumerable. And he added, that thus Lakshmi, Saraswati, Durga, Kali Shiva, Uma, Radha, Krishna, Rama and Sita, and the grouping

Kovilpur Digital Library

of Hindu customs and traditions and the very structure of Hindu society, are all methods for the attainment of the Spiritual Perception and thus are *Real in the most powerful and inclusive definition of Reality.* And thus the Gods are Eternal, and thus Hinduism, in the ideal, is Eternal. And thus the Sanatana Dharma is TRUE in the completeness of the Whole of Truth. The Colonel was amazed. This was Revelation; it was Illumination; it was Divinity made manifest, as it were, in the soaring of the Spiritual Intelligence. And all present felt, "Here is a Hindu Patriot and Prophet in One!"

But now one turns from the group of European and Indian listeners and from the eloquence of the monk to the silence and the inner workings of the Swami's own mind. Daily he went to Pavhari Baba. He was in right earnest after spiritual realisation and his mind was ever anxious to progress more and more. There was at all times with him a spiritual dissatisfaction and restlessness. He was always seeking, always striving, always analysing. And in this spirit he retired into a solitary lemon-garden, said to be haunted, where he practised intense austerities in spite of ill-health and made efforts to plunge his soul into the Highest Reality.

And in his soul there flowed two different streams of tendency, one of the Man of Dakshineswar and the other, that of an admiration for the Saint, Pavhari Baba. Alternately they rose, now crossing each other, and then one running swifter than the other as they were swept by the winds of analytic thought. Finally it came to "Ramakrishna or Pavhari Baba—Which?" "I have not gained all", thought the Swami, "by becoming Sri Ramakrishna's disciple. Why do not I find eternal peace yet? Why cannot I remain merged in Brahman? Perhaps Pavhari Baba will help me in developing further. Shall I take initiation from the Baba? What a wonderful man he is! How great is his life! How luminous his realisation! How he refuses to take the position of a Guru! Yes, let me become his disciple and perform Sadhana under his guidance!" In his intense restlessness to be merged in the Absolute, did the Swami forget himself for

Kovilloor Digital Library

the time being? Did he forget the words of the Master? "You have now tasted the Highest Realisation of the soul, the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi. For the present it will be kept locked up and the key will remain with me. Now you have work to do. When you have finished that, you will enter into this Samâdhi without a break!" Did it escape the Swami's mind, that he was to be SELF-SUFFICIENT, that he was to be his *own* Guru, that he was destined to spread the Master's teaching by realising HIS OWN INHERENT STRENGTH? Or was it an intense *abhimâna* against his beloved Master that he should still be a prey to mental unrest?

Thus, when the Swami rose as if to go to the cave of the Yogi, Pavhari Baba, near by, something held him back. His feet refused to move; his body became heavy. A great wave of sadness came over him. He felt heart-sick. And a flood of feeling, as of one who feels that he has been hurt by the conduct of his loved one, overpowered him and he sank to the ground. He was in a terrible quandary, wondering, *wondering*, "What is this?" O this was indeed a critical time, a time of a most awful test! He no longer asked, "Which is it to be, Ramakrishna or Pavhari Baba?" He had made the stern decision; but at the very thought his eyes filled with tears: his throat was as if choked. And it was as if an ague seized him. And, lo, in that terribble state of agony, illumining the darkness of the room the Man of Dakshineswar appeared before him, looking intensely into his eyes, saying nothing—but O those eyes! Through the mist of tears with which they were covered, the chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, saw worlds of power, divinity, love and insight. The Swami was abashed. He felt, "O I am disloyal!" He was overcome by self-reproach; he was bathed in a flood of tears. The form of the Master was still there looking with an expression of sadness into his eyes. Two or three hours passed in the vividness of this vision. Not a word issued from the Swami's lips. His body was in a sweat of suffering; his mind was as though pounded. The Deeper Instinct finally

Koviloor Digital Library

asserted itself. "No ! No !" he cried out in spiritual agony. "It *must* be Ramakrishna. It IS Ramakrishna !" Let me remain true to Thee ! I can go to none other,—to *none* other. O Thou art my God ! Ramakrishna ! Ramakrishna !"

For twenty-one days this struggle continued. Beads of sweat, from sheer agony, rolled down his face. He was now joyous, now in utmost pain ; now he wavered, and then he would throw all the strength of his being into the Soul of Ramakrishna. Those were the stormy days of his soul, the like of which he had never experienced before. Alone he was in that garden, eating nothing but the barest food got by begging, and drinking the juice of lemons only. These were the hours of test and agony, when his spirit passed through the night of the soul. For twenty-one days and as many times he resolved to become the disciple of Pavhari Baba, if for no other reason than to TEST the truth of his vision ; and twenty-one nights there stood the Master by his side for hours at those very times, and *THINGS OCCURRED OF WHICH THE SWAMI NEVER SPOKE* though earnestly requested. In the end it was "Ramakrishna ! Ramakrishna !" O those were terrible days ! But finally from the very depths of his torn spirit, out from the very waters of his agony the Form of Ecstasy revealed Itself, and from that time Ramakrishna dwelt forever in the Tabernacle of His Chief Disciple's Personality. Long after, the Swami composed a poem in Bengali entitled, "A Song I Sing To Thee," in which one finds a glimpse of this experience. A portion of this poem reads,——

" * * * * * * * * * * * *

Like to the playing of a little child
Is every attitude of mine towards Thee.
Even at times I dared be angered with Thee ;
Even, at times, I'd wander far away ;—
Yet there, in greyest gloom of darkest night,
Yet there, with speechless mouth and tearful eyes,
Thou standest fronting me, and Thy sweet Face
Stoops down with loving look on face of mine.

Koviloor Digital Library

Then, instantly, I turn myself to Thee,
And at Thy Feet I fall on bended knees.
I crave no pardon at Thy gentle hands,
For Thou art never angry with Thy son.
Who else with all my foolish freaks would bear !
Thou art my Master ! Thou art my soul's real mate!
Many a time I see Thee,——I am Thee !
Aye ! I am Thou, and Thou, my Lord, art I !

* * * * * * * * * * * "

Koviloor Digital Library

LXVI

AMIDST SHIFTING SCENES.

Next,—there was a call from Benares, the intelligence being the illness of Abhedananda ; and the Swami arose from the lemon-garden and from his *sadhanananda* or bliss of realisations and hurried to the Sacred City. On and off at this period, it seemed as if he was repeatedly driven to Benares, that seat of everything in Hinduism, in order to absorb more and more of the spirit of the Indian Ages within its venerable and holy precincts. Benares is the ecclesiastical centre of the Hindu world. Therefore he was glad to visit it time and again, when opportunity presented itself.

In Kashi he became the guest of the great Sanskrit scholar, Pramada Das Mitra. After making every arrangement for the comfort and treatment of his sick Brother, and leaving the Swami Premananda to nurse him, he went to live in the garden of his host where he practised numerous austerities ; and from there also he occasionally made the round of the temples, mingling with the swarms of devotees. He fathomed more and more the historic import of the place, making of the national life a deeper and yet deeper study, in order to perceive the effulgence of its spirit and its latent powers. He desired to sound the depth of the wisdom of the Rishis.

Whilst he was in this atmosphere of austerity and patriotic study, and whilst he was with the Swami Abhedananda, who had gradually recovered his health, news came to him that Balaram Babu, that great householder-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, had passed away. On hearing this he wept. The memory of innumerable days of sweetness and invaluable friendship crowded in upon him and he lamented that all the great Bhaktas of the Lord were passing away one by one. Suresh Mitra had already gone some few months before,

Kovilor Digital Library

and now Balaram Babu was no more! Seeing him lamenting thus, his host, with whom the Swami had frequent discussions on the Shâstras and talks about Sri Ramakrishna, said to him, "Sire, you are a Sannyâsin! Why should you weep? It does not befit you to mourn." To which the Swami replied, "What! Do you think that because a man is a Sannyâsin, he has no heart! The life of true Sannyâs makes one feel the more. We are men after all! Then, too, is he not my *gurubhai*? Did we not sit together at the Feet of the Master? What do I care for that Sannyâs which is as cold as stone!" And possessed with the intention of bringing solace to the bereaved family who were all Bhaktas of the Master and also to inquire into the affairs of the Order, the Swami left Benares for Calcutta. And now that he was back to that same old life of prayer and devotion in the Baranagore monastery, he encouraged the monks whom he loved with his whole heart, to live up to the life of the Ideal.

Thus almost four years and a half had passed since the *mahâsamâdhi* of Sri Ramakrishna. The first year and a part of the second, counting from 1886, had been employed in the founding and consolidation of the Order in Calcutta. The next two years and a half had been spent on and off in travels. And the last six months, being the first of the fifth year, had been spent in Ghazipur, Benares and Baranagore. And all along the mind of the Leader had been developing, for his was always a growing mind. All along he had been making innumerable observations upon the relationship between the Dharma and Society in India, finding these to be at all times conterminous growths and indissolubly interwoven, for whenever India was historically great, he realised, it was *because* the spiritual impetus had been set in motion. And he formulated the doctrine in his own mind and preached to his *gurubhais* on every occasion that, SPIRITUALITY was the FOUNDATION of Indian culture and Indian greatness, and that the solution of all the social problems with which India was burdened must be sought and worked out FROM THAT POINT OF VIEW. He had become

Kovilpur Digital Library

spiritually patriotic and patriotically spiritual. He had amassed an incalculable amount of historical information which he shared with the monks on each return from his wanderings, as a SPIRITUAL possession, so that they came to look upon the Master and the Culture from which he sprung, and of which he was an Incarnation, as One. But even whilst he was giving forth this new vision of Dharma, the spirit of restlessness seized him anew, and this time it literally cast him out for years from the Baranagore Math and his *gurubhais*. Day by day he felt himself being drawn into a web of relationships and responsibilities for which his soul knew it was not as yet ready, and calls on his time and his attention were coming from all sides. These made him yearn above all other things for the life of the *parivrâjaka*. In one sense he did not perhaps know what he desired,—except "to get out of the hornets' nest, and realise the Truth." And back of it all was a PURPOSE, for in leading the *parivrâjaka* life for still further years he was to become all the more confident of himself, and all the surer, all the clearer about the Message he was to give. But then, he must settle down; he must give himself up to contemplation; he must solve all problems of the soul, and of the land he was born in. For the thought of the PEOPLE came frequently to his mind. Oftentimes he felt like "throwing it all up" and work for the salvation of India, for the re-vivifying of the Spirit of Bharatavarsha, but something held him back,—the Monk in him. He was to be the spokesman of a wonderful message to society, but he,—he must always remain the *monk*. So his soul was pressing the conscious mind to wander on to new paths. And, therefore, after remaining only two months in the monastery he started out in July 1890 with the same old determination,—never to return. And this time his purpose was accomplished in a measure, for it so happened that seven years had passed before he found himself again in the circle of his brother-monks, and meanwhile the monastery had been removed from Baranagore to Alumbazar. This time the Swami formulated the intention of per-

Koviloor Digital Library

forming a pilgrimage to the Himalayas from which the Swami Akhandananda had just returned, with tales of marvellous interest and with descriptions of far-off Thibet and beauteous Kashmir. He had told the Swami of the Thibetan lamaseries and of the grandeurs of Kedarnath and the Badrikashrama, and the Leader said to him, "You are my man! You have grit! Come, let us be off together!"

From now on, one sees the Swami assimilating more than ever the culture of Hinduism in all its phases. The chief disciple of Ramakrishna, the boy-saint of Dakshineswar becomes the Prophet in the constant process of becoming. He who had learned the first principles of Hinduism with Sri Ramakrishna and had received a rare education thereby, now became the constant student of its *means of application*. The philosophy of the Vedas and the Upanishads must be made to shine from *within* and even *as* the Life of the People. He was to be the Prophet *and* the Patriot. But what was pressing him most from within just now and was uppermost in his thoughts, was the persistent impulse to concentrate all the powers of the mind and make his soul a blazing fire of Realisation. So he thought, "This time in my wanderings I shall look for nothing save the cave in which to meditate." So when he left the monastery now,—it was for good. Indeed, it was "for good" often before, but circumstances prevented the carrying out of this resolution. In a letter to a fellow-monk, dated July the sixth, 1890, the Swami wrote:—

"I had no intention to leave Ghazipur this time and certainly did not want to come to Calcutta, but Kali's illness made me go to Benares and Balaram's sudden death brought me to Calcutta. So Suresh Babu and Balaram Babu have both gone! Girish Babu is supporting the Math. • • • • • • • I intend shortly, as soon as I can get a portion of my fare, to go up to Almora and thence to some place in Gharwal on the Ganges where I can settle down for a long meditation. Gangadhar is accompanying me. Indeed, it was with this desire and intention that I brought him down from Kashmir. • • • • • • •

"I am in fine health now, and the good I gained by my stay in Ghazipur will last, I am sure, for some time. But, as of old, I am in a hornet's

Koviloor Digital Library

nest and just fidgeting for a flight to the Himalayas. This time I shall not go to Pavhari Baba or to any other saint,—they rather divert one from his highest purpose. Straight up ! * * * * *

"Free from pride and delusion, with the evil of attachment conquered, ever dwelling in the Self, with desires completely receded, liberated from the pairs of opposites, known as pleasure and pain, the undeluded reach that Goal Eternal.'

" * * * * Arise, ye mighty one, and be strong. Work on and struggle on and on * * * * * * * "

Before leaving the Math he told his *gurubhais*, "I shall not return until I acquire such realisation that my very touch will transform a man." But before actually leaving Calcutta, the Swami went on foot to Ghusrie, a village across the Ganges, where he sought out the Holy Mother to receive her blessings, prior to his long journey. And he told her, "Mother, I shall not return until I have attained the Highest Jnanam !" The Holy Mother looked at him as though he were a child, and touching his forehead she blessed him in the Name of the Master. And a sudden joy welled up in the heart of the Swami. Yes, —with that blessing he felt that he could go anywhere, facing all dangers and all uncertainties, even the terrors of the solitary jungle, aye, even death itself. The Holy Mother said, "My son, will you not see your mother at home before leaving ?" and he answered, "Mother, you alone are my Mother !" And seeing his spirit, the Holy Mother again blessed him, saying, "*Esho ! Esho !*" which means, "Come ! Come !" for in India the words implying farewell are unknown, since the Hindu holds that what comes and goes is the body, not the soul.

Thus one sees the Swami, restless and impatient, ridding his heart of all attachment so as to fulfil his purpose and journey on to the Himalayas. He was glad to be off once again. He thought that a long meditation in the Himalayas would give him peace. And yet his intention was not to hurry thither by rail. He planned to travel on foot by the Ganges side, and beg his food on the way, as a common Sadhu, and thus make the whole journey a *sadhana* and *tapasya*. From the moment he left Calcutta he was happy.

Kovilpur Digital Library

The solitude, the village air, the seeing of new places, the meeting with new people and the getting rid of old impressions and of worry delighted him. The first place at which he and Akhandananda halted for some days was Bhagalpur. Here he met a member of the Brahmo Samaj, who had known him in former days when he, likewise, was a Brahmo. When the monks arrived in the forenoon they betook themselves to the Ganges side. One Mathuranath Sinha, a pleader, who was then in Bhagalpur and who met the Swami, wrote a letter dated August the eleventh, 1905, to a disciple of his in which he describes his reminiscences of him in regard to that time in the following words :—

About fifteen years ago, I was at Bhagalpur, as the guest of Babu Manmathanath Chowdhury. One morning I heard of some stir caused by the arrival of two Sannyâsins. They were seen by Kumar Nityananda Singh. Something led the Kumar to suppose that they were not of the ordinary type of Sadhus ; and a short conversation confirmed his views and disclosed the fact that they were highly educated and that one of them, who was later known as the Swami Vivekananda, was marvellously gifted. The very sight of them prepossessed me in their favour. I remembered to have seen the latter, in my college days at Calcutta, as often leading the choir at the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj."

"As others tell the story, the writer was much surprised to find a Brahmo turned a Hindu Sannyasin, and so was extraordinarily anxious to talk with the Swami and find out how he had become re-Hinduised. He continues :

"My conversation with him covered a large area, including literature, philosophy and religion. The main topics were the last two. It seemed that learning and spirituality were the very air which he breathed. I discerned that the soul of his teaching was an intense and unselfish patriotism with which he invested and vivified his subjects. This was an abiding characteristic with him. When I read the glowing descriptions of the success he won at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, I felt that in him India had found her MAN."

The hearing which the Swami gained from those who became his admirers in Bhagalpur was nothing short of wonderful. The prepossessing influence with which the Swami's personality was saturated must have been unique, even at that distant day. His very appearance revealed him as a

Kovilpoor Digital Library

gifted individual. The way in which he and Akhandananda carried themselves was in itself a credential, greatly in their favour, for they walked like princes and begged like kings in disguise. Then, a certain power and ecstasy emanated from the Swami, which made him conspicuous as a man of realisation. There was, moreover, a certain sweetness, dignity and grace about him, that almost immediately engendered love and respect on the part of those who met him. Poorly clad, and with only their staffs and *kamandalus* in hand, they were nevertheless possessed of something which bespoke tales of stirring adventure, of distant cities, of virgin forests, of the eternal mountains, of the places of holy pilgrimage and of isolated sites along the banks of rivers, with only a jungle as the background and the sky and the flowing waters for companionship. Thus they had at once attracted the attention of one of the prominent citizens of the town as they sat down on the river's side, near the palace of the Raja Shivachandra, looking tired from a long walk but their countenances beaming with the fire of *Vairâgyam*.

One of those who became the staunchest admirer of the Swami at Bhagalpur was Manmathanath Babu to whom Mathuranath Sinha had referred as his host. This gentleman who was a Brahmo, became re-Hinduised by the Swami's eloquence and spiritual genius, and was even made a believer in the Radha-Krishna Leela. In June, 1906, he wrote to a disciple of the Swami :—

"One morning in August of the year 1890, Swami Vivekananda with Swami Akhandananda suddenly came to my house. Thinking them to be ordinary Sadhus I did not show them much respect. We were sitting together after our noon-day meal; and believing them to be ignorant, I did not enter into conversation with them, but began to read an English translation of a work on Buddhism. After a while, Swamiji asked me what book I was reading. In reply, I told him the title of the book and asked, 'Do you know English?' He replied, 'Yes, a little.' Then I conversed with him on Buddhism, but after a short time, I found out that he was a thousand times more learned than myself. He quoted from many English works, and Babu Mathuranath Sinha of Danapur and myself were astonished at his learning and listened to him with rapt attention. Swami Akhandananda had remained silent. To

Kovilpur Digital Library

test his knowledge I asked, 'Were Sakyasinha's (Buddha's) austerities practised with the Hindu Sannyâsins fruitless?' He replied, 'No, none of his devotional practices were fruitless. For, by going through those severe austerities with the Hindu Sannyâsins before he became the Buddha, Sakyasinha earned the powers by which he was able to formulate and preach his doctrines.' This reply seemed to me to be a wise one, and I was satisfied that the second Sannyâsin was also not illiterate. Thus, various talks on religious matters went on till the evening, when the Swami Akhandananda chanted several Sanskrit hymns with great devotion. After that we used to spend the time in conversation upon elevating subjects.

"One day Swamiji asked me if I practised any special Sadhanas, and we conversed on the practice of Yoga for a long time. From this I was convinced that he was not a common man, as what he spoke about Yoga was exactly the same as that which I had heard from the Swami Dayananda Sarasvati. Besides, he gave out many other important things on the subject, which were of such a nature as I had not heard elsewhere.

"Then, to test his knowledge of Sanskrit, I brought out all the Upanishads that I had with me and questioned him on many abstruse passages from them. By his illuminating replies I found that his mastery of the Scriptures was of an extraordinary kind. And the way in which he recited from the Upanishads was charming. Thus, being firmly convinced of his wonderful knowledge equally in English, Sanskrit and in Yoga, I was greatly drawn towards him. Though he stayed in my house for only seven days, I became so devoted to him that I resolved in my mind that by no means whatever would I let him go elsewhere. So I strongly urged him to live always at Bhagalpur.

"Once I noticed him humming a tune to himself. So I asked him if he could sing. He replied, 'Very little.' Being pressed hard by us he sang, and what was my surprise to see that as in learning so in music he had wonderful accomplishment! Next day I proposed to him to let me invite several singers and musicians of the place, and getting his consent I invited many of the musicians, several of whom were *ostads*, or adepts in the art. Believing the music would end by nine or ten at the latest I did not arrange for supper for the guests. Beginning from the evening, Swamiji went on singing without ceasing till two or three o'clock in the morning. All without exception were so charmed, that they forgot hunger and thirst and all idea of time! None moved from his seat or thought of going home. Kailash Babu, who was playing on the instrument in accompaniment to the Swami's songs, gave up doing so at last, as his hands had become stiff and had lost all sensation. Finally, when Swamiji saw that no one showed any inclination to leave,

Kovilloor Digital Library

he stopped singing. It is needless to mention that all went without food that night. Such superhuman power I have never seen in anybody, nor do I expect to see it again. The next evening, all the guests of the previous night, and many others, presented themselves without any invitation; the player on the instrument also came, but Swamiji did not sing that evening. So everyone was disappointed.

"Another day I proposed to introduce him to all the rich men of Bhagalpur, and that I myself would take him to them in my carriage so that it would not be any trouble to him. But he declined and said, 'It is not the Sannyâsin's Dharma to visit the rich!' His fiery renunciation made a deep impression on me; indeed, in his company I was taught many lessons which have always remained with me as spiritual ideals.

"From my boyhood, I had been inclined to live in some solitary place and perform Sadhanas. When I met Swamiji, this desire grew strong. I often told him, 'Let us both go to Brindaban, and depositing three hundred Rupees for each of us in the temple of Sri Govindaji we shall have as food Govindaji's *prasad* for the rest of our lives. Thus, without being a burden to anyone, we shall practise devotion day and night in a sequestered spot on the banks of the Holy Jumuna!' In reply to this he said, 'Yes, for a special temperament or nature this scheme is no doubt good, but not for all,' meaning himself, who had renounced everything. Amongst many new ideas, the two which I heard from him were:

"'Whatever of the ancient Aryan knowledge, intellect and genius of our race are still left can be mostly found in those parts which lie by the banks of the Ganges. The more I go away from the Ganges, the less I notice them. This convinces me of the greatness of the Ganges as sung in our Scriptures.'

"'The epithet *mild Hindu*, instead of being a word of reproach ought really to point to our glory, as expressing a greatness of character. For, see, how much moral and spiritual advancement and how much development of the qualities of love and compassion have to be acquired before one can get rid of the brute force from his nature, which actuates the ruining and the slaughter of one's brother-men for self-aggrandisement!'

"Swamiji visited only two places while staying at Bhagalpur. The first occasion was when we went to see the holy man of Barari, the late Parvati Charan Mukhopadhyaya; the second was when we paid a visit to the Temple of Nathnagar, one of the holy places of the Jaina community, and there Swamiji talked with the Jaina Achâryas on their religion. He was much pleased with his visits, and was also delighted to see the beauty of the scenery on the banks of the Ganges and remarked, 'These spots are very much suited for Sadhana.'

Kevilgor Digital Library

"It used to pain me very much when certain detractors criticised him for taking up Sannyâsa, because he had been born a Kayastha, and not a Brâhmana. They little knew what he was, and that birth had very little to do in the making of a saint. Of course, one has to look to the caste of a Sadhu when the only qualification of such an one is the garb he wears; otherwise how can the Brâhmanas reconcile themselves to offer worship to such unless they have at least the consolation of knowing that their object of veneration is a Brâhmana by birth? The Swami was born with the Brâhmanical consciousness and was thus ten times more a Brâhmana than he whose sole claim thereto is the fact that he was born of Brâhmana parents. And, after all, who can resist the worship of true worth and saintliness!

"Swamiji fully knew in his heart that I would not willingly or easily let him depart from Bhagalpur. So, one day when I went away elsewhere on some important business, he grasped this opportunity of leaving, after taking farewell of those at home. When I came back I made a strenuous search after him, but could gather no clue of him anywhere. And yet, why should I have thought that my will would avail! Why should Swamiji be like a frog in the well, when his field of work was the whole wide world!

"He had expressed to me his intention of going to the Badrikashrama. Therefore, after he had left Bhagalpur, I made search for him everywhere, even going up to Almora in the Himalayas. There I received information from Lala Badri Sah, that he had left Almora some time before; and knowing that he must have journeyed a long way in the direction of the Northern Tirtha, I was compelled to give up my idea of following him.

"It was my heart's desire to bring him once more to Bhagalpur after his return from America, but he could not come, having then perhaps very little leisure or opportunity to do so."

Indeed, that the Swami was a unique genius even in these days is at once made evident, when it is remembered that he who wrote this epistle had been a Brahmo and had become so thoroughly re-Hinduised as to go in search of the Swami to the distant town of Almora in the mountains, with a desire to follow the *parivrâjaka* life in his company. Before leaving Bhagalpur, however, the Swami held a long discussion with the Jaina teachers concerning the merits of their religious beliefs. He rationalised their mythology satisfactorily for himself, and was considered by them even as a Pandit in their own school of thought.

Kovilloor Digital Library

He held the Jaina religion as verily a part and parcel of the Sanatana Dharma itself, and saw its kinship with the Buddhist philosophy. He saw the greatness of both the sects of Jainaism, the Digambaras and Swetambaras, and was a devotee, as it were, of the Tirthankaras.

At the instance of Akhandananda, the Swami next visited Vaidyanath. Here he became acquainted with Babu Raj Narayan Bose, the venerable old Brahmo preacher. For certain reasons he had instructed his *gurubhai* not to let the great man know that he knew English. Accordingly he talked in Bengali, and with an eloquence and brilliancy of thought which charmed the old man. In the course of conversation many ideas arose that required the use of English words, as for example "plus." But the Swami got over the difficulty, making the plus sign by crossing his fingers. Not once did the sage dream that the monk before him knew the foreign tongue as well as his own mother-tongue; and he would have been greatly surprised if he had known that the Swami was a graduate of the Calcutta University. Akhandananda had a hard time of it to refrain from telling the secret, for he delighted in extolling the merits of the Leader. Much later when Swamiji's name became famous throughout the length and breadth of Hindusthan, Raj Narayan Bose came to know that it was he who visited him years ago and remembered his meeting with him; he said in surprise, "What! Not for an instant did I imagine when he talked with me that he knew English! He must be, indeed, a wonderful man!" After passing the night with him, the monks started for Benares on the following day.

Again in Benares! Coming and going on the highways of Sannyâsin life, the Swami was destined to make the Sacred City of Kashi the place of repeated pilgrimage. But this was to be his last visit to this place, until his triumphant return from the West. When in Benares, his very soul was in a ferment to realise its highest expression and power, and in the way of a startling declaration which proved later on to be a luminous prophecy, he said to Pramada Das Mitra in the pres-

Koviloor Digital Library

ence of many others, "I shall now leave Kashi, but shall never return until I have burst upon society like a bomb-shell and it will follow me 'like a dog'!" And he went forth from Benares determined that his own life and his own realisation should be an invincible power to awaken the highest self-consciousness of his race. And he did not return to the Sacred City until verily he had stirred up the world to new modes of thought and resurrected the spirit of the Indian Ages.

The Monk Akhandananda next led the Swami to Ayodhya of holy memories. He said to his companion, "Swamiji, you must see the Mohanta, Janakibar Saran! You will find him a great man! He is full of Bhakti!" But the Swami answered, "What do I care for all this nonsense!: I am through now! It only means further and further delay!: Let me go to the Himalayas!" But Akhandananda insisted, "For my sake, Swamiji, come to Ayodhya!" And wishing to please him, the Swami at last consented. And so they came to Ayodhya. Almost immediately they betook themselves to the hermitage of the saint, who treated the wanderers with great respect, welcoming them to his Ashrama. The two monks had many long conversations with the Mohanta who was a scholar in the Sanskrit and Persian languages. And Janakibar Saran spoke to them of what he knew, specially on Bhakti, in a simple and yet touching manner, for he was a man of realisation, and he was carried beyond himself until he rose to a state of *Bhâva*, or Divine ecstasy. The monks were charmed. After having partaken of the abbot's hospitality, they directed their steps towards the mountains. But as they came forth from the monastery, the Swami pausing a while turned to Akhandananda and said with an intensity of feeling, "I am glad that you brought me here!: I have seen a MAN, a real holy man!"

Koviloor Digital Library

LXVII

WANDERINGS IN THE HIMALAYAS.

Next, one sees the Swami and his *gurubhai* as the guests of Babu Rama Prosonno Bhattacharya in Naini Tal, where they remained for some six days. Thither they had walked across the stretch of country lying at the foot of the mountains. From Naini Tal the Swami started out in real earnest for the Badrikashrama, determined to walk all the way without a pice. On and on he and Akhandananda went, "eating food that chance might bring." On the third day while he was thus travelling penniless and was for many hours without food, he sat himself down under an ancient Banyan-tree, on the bank of a flowing stream. "This place is charming! What a delightful spot for meditation!" he said to his companion. After a refreshing bath he sat down under that Banyan-tree, and in a few moments was shrouded in meditation. His body looked like a statue,—motionless, stiff and as if the life had gone out of it; but there was a deep state of vision and of beatitude mirrored on his countenance. Akhandananda knew not what to make of this; it was indeed like a deep *samâdhi*. A long, long time the Swami remained in this state. When he came to his normal consciousness he addressing his comrade exclaimed, "O Gangadhar, I have just passed through one of the greatest moments of my life! Here under this Banyan-tree one of the greatest problems of my life has been solved!" His fellow-monk looked at the Swami and saw his face beaming with ecstasy. "What is it, Swamiji?" he cried out. And the Swami answered, "I have found the Oneness between the macrocosm and the microcosm! In this little *Brahmânda* of the body everything that there is, exists. I have seen the *whole Universe* within an atom!" And he rose to a supreme moment of Jnanam, and for that whole day discussed with him the history of his realisation.

Koviloor Digital Library

What Swamiji entered in a fragmentary way in his note-book on that day, is given here, in translation, as it was found, verbatim. From this one may get a glimpse of his trend of thought and realisation. It reads :—

"[Kakrhighat, under the shade of a Banyan, by the bank of a stream.]

" 'In the beginning was the Word. Word &c.

"The Microcosm and the Macrocosm are one. As the little self is covered in the living body, so also the Great Universal Self is covered in the external universe which is the *Prakriti* made up of intelligence or life.

" 'Shivâ on (the bosom of) the Shiva !'—is not imagination. As a mental idea and a word or speech can be pierced through, so is the one's covering the other. It can be only realised by analysing, through the means of mental inference or imaginating faculty. None can think without words.

"Hence, 'In the beginning was the Word', etc.

"This state of manifestation of the Universal Self is without beginning and without end. Hence we know, see, feel, and so on, through the unification of the dual aspects of the Self—the Eternally Formless, and the Eternally-with-Form."

In the distant West, when as the Teacher he gave his lectures on the Macrocosm and the Microcosm, one who knows the story, sees reflected in their contents some of the light of this sublime realisation.

When the two monks were some short distance from Almora and had gone for many hours without food they sat down on the roadside just opposite a Moslem cemetery. Indeed, the Swami almost fainted with hunger, and sank to the ground from sheer exhaustion. Akhandananda went to fetch water. The keeper of the cemetery was a *fakir* who lived in a hut there. Happening to pass by, and seeing the plight of the monk, he offered him a cucumber which was the only thing in the shape of food that he could provide. The Swami asked the *fakir* to put the cucumber to his mouth, saying that he was too faint to do so himself. The man remonstrated saying, "Holy Sir, I am a Mussulman !" "That matters nothing," said the Swami with a smile. "Are we not all brothers ?" After having been fed by this good Samaritan he felt himself refreshed. In fact, he said of this incident in later times, "The man really saved my life. For I had never

Koviloor Digital Library

felt so exhausted." And in after days, when the citizens of Almora came out in a body to welcome the "World-famous Swami Vivekananda" into their midst and to give him a grand reception, he suddenly stopped the procession. For he had espied this same old Mussulman *fakir*, peering at him with curiosity from the crowd. The Mussulman had forgotten that face, but the Swami remembered him at sight. And telling those who were with him of the occurrence of the remote past when the man had practically saved his life, he gave him some money as a present and as a token of grateful remembrance.

All the long journey from Kathgodam at the foot of the hills to Almora had been more than interesting. Here amidst the stillness and the beauty of the hills the Swami found a certain quietude of heart and a sweet stillness of thought he had rarely known before. He instinctively found himself moved by this stillness and by the glory of Nature as manifested in the creeping on of dawn or in the flaming sunsets of even-tide. The fresh mountain-air invigorated his spirit; and even in spite of much physical weariness caused by long walks and want of food, this first part of his tour in the Uttarakhanda was the very acme of pleasure and of blessedness.

When he arrived in Almora, Akhandananda took him to the garden of Amba Dutt, whilst he himself went to inform his *gurubhais*, Saradananda and Kripananda, to whom the Swami had written that letter of July the sixth, before leaving the Baranagore monastery. These two monks had been in the Himalayas for some time; and with great eagerness they hastened to the garden of Amba Dutt to meet their Leader. And Lala Badri Sah, who was their host, went likewise to the garden and welcomed the Swami to his home. Here he held a long discussion with one Sri Krishna Joshi, the Sheristadar, on the necessity of becoming a Sannyâsin. He spoke of the glory of the life of renunciation, which to his mind was the Ideal of all Indian aspiration. He presented his arguments with all the powerful realisation of his personal

Koviloor Digital Library

experience and the Brâhman Joshi bowed down before the Swami.

In his short stay at the house of Lala Badri Sah, the Swami had a peculiar experience. Someone came to his host, saying, "Come ! There is one here who is possessed by a *devatâ*, a demi-god !" Lala Badri Sah arose and then the Swami said, "I shall also go with you !" So both the monk and his host joined by many others, went to the place where "he who was possessed by a *devatâ*" lay in high fever, writhing in frenzy, and groaning in agony. A group of persons sat about the man, holding him down, whilst a priest practised *mantrams* and incantations on him so as to rid the sufferer of his affliction. When the Swami arrived, everybody made way for him. The *gerrua* cloth awakened reverence and the people called out, "O here is a Sadhu, a Mahatma ! He will cure the man!" The Swami had not expected this. He was only interested to see the patient, because of the psychological character of the phenomena. He felt that there might be some new facts to gather, some new lessons to learn, and with this in mind he had accompanied his host to the scene. When the people besieged him with prayers to cure the man, he replied, "Who am I, my brothers ! I am only a Sannyâsin ! The Lord will take care of him !" But the people pressed him ; they fell at his feet ; they begged and begged him. Finding no other course of escape he said, "I shall see !" And the Swami gathered all the forces of his soul together, and laying his hand upon the sick man's head he repeated in his innermost soul the Name of his Ishtam over and over again. The man who had been writhing in pain and who had been tormented by a raging fever became restful ! Quieter and quieter he grew until he was perfectly calm. After a little while he completely recovered ; and when he heard who it was that had restored him, he fell at his feet in a fervent prayer of thanksgiving.

After this strange occurrence, the Swami lived for a few days at the house of Lala Badri Sah, and then he left his

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

devoted host and the company of his beloved fellow-monks. Finding a solitary cave, he entered it to perform the most severe forms of *sadhana*. There in that cave, overhanging a mountain-village, he practised austerities day and night. He determined to find Truth. And there in the silence, with not even a single soul to disturb his meditation, he had experience after experience in the way of illumination until his face shone with a celestial fire. And then, at the very climax of all his spiritual exercises, instead of abiding in the ultimatum of personal bliss which he expected to do, he felt the IMPETUS TO WORK, and this seemed to force him out, as it were, from his *sadhana*. This was a strange time for him. The Monk Akhandananda has spoken of it thus: "It seemed as if every time the Swami desired to retire into the life of silence and pure monasticism, he was compelled to give it up by the pressure of circumstances. He had a Mission to fulfil, and the very essence of his nature would force him into the realisation of this line of work."

Succeeding this experience in the mountain-cave and realising that he must follow that impetus, he returned to the house of Lala Badri Sah and the society of his brother-monks. But terrible news awaited him there. A telegram had been sent some days before, bearing the news of the death of one of his sisters in dire circumstances and under most pitiable conditions. This caused him great anguish of heart and yet even in this grief he saw other realities. Through this perspective of his personal woe he seemed to have become rudely awakened to the great problems of Indian Womanhood, and this fostered patriotism in his heart. He however decided to wander into the wilder mountains. Then, too, the thought that he had been found out by his home people aggravated the *monk* in him,—for he had cut off all bonds. The situation was a peculiar mingling of the domestic and monastic consciousness, and the balance of thought and determination swung with power into the latter spirit.

Therefore he suddenly left the residence of Lala Badri Sah in company with the monks, Saradananda, Akhandananda

Koviloor Digital Library

and Kripananda, turning his steps towards Garhwal. He passed through Karna Prayag; but some way beyond, he became ill with fever whilst staying in a *chati*, or halting-place for pilgrims. For three days he remained in the *chati* and thence, having sufficiently recovered, he journeyed on to Rudra Prayag. The scenery in these parts is beautiful beyond description, with its water-falls and shadows on the hills and its perfect peace and solitude. The invigorating atmosphere buoyed up the spirit of the Swami and here and there a glimpse of the Eternal Snows gladdened his heart and fulfilled all the ardent picturing of the Himalayas he had so often made to himself, both in childhood and in youth. At Rudra Prayag he met a Bengali Sannyâsin, Purnananda by name, with whom he spent the night. But there he was again attacked by fever. He was worse this time than when at the *chati* some distance back. Seeing his helpless condition, the Court Amin of the place gave him some Ayurvedic medicine and, when he improved, sent him by *dandi* to Srinagar, where he gradually recovered. The monks had now travelled more than one hundred and twenty miles from Almora, and they were more than one hundred and sixty miles from Kathgodam, whence they had commenced their journey to the Badrikashrama. It had taken them more than two weeks to accomplish the distance from Almora, and the time had been spent in wandering slowly up the mountain paths, begging their food, meditating, and holding religious conversation.

At Srinagar the monks took up their abode in a lonely hut, by the banks of the Alakananda river, where they came to know that the Swami Turiyananda had lived before. In this hut the Swami and his Brothers passed many days, living on *mâdhukari bhikshâ*, which means, literally, begging a few morsels of food from each house in the village, "even as the bee supports itself with particles of honey from each flower." During these travels and specially here the Swami instructed the *gurubhâis* in the teachings of the Upanishads. For days and days in Srinagar he spent most of the time in read-

Kavikar Digital Library

ing to them these Scriptures until their minds became saturated with their meaning and their message. While at Srinagar he met a schoolmaster, by caste a Vaishya, who was a recent convert to Christianity. The Swami spoke to him on the glories of the Vedic religion, and he became repentant for having renounced the Sanatana Dharma and longed to return into the Hindu fold. He became greatly attached to the monks and often entertained them in his house.

Having performed much *sadhana* and meditation in Srinagar, the Swami next left for Tehri. In the course of their wanderings the Swamis arrived at a village, perfectly exhausted, when it was quite dark. They were very hungry as they could get nothing on their way. They had wandered through thick forests where they heard the roar of a tiger near them. Finding a dilapidated *dharmasala* in this village they took shelter therein and resting a short while went to the homes of the villagers and called out to them for alms. But they did not respond in spite of their repeated calls. Indeed, there is a saying current amongst Sannyâsins to the effect that, where a hungry Sadhu does not get his *bhikshâ* after asking for it again and again he has even to threaten. Of course, it is said in fun. With this adage in mind, the monks gathered together in the centre of the village and waving their staffs and shouting at the top of their voices, threatened and threatened unless food was brought. They had at first begged mildly ; this failing, they had had recourse to the means which with the Sadhus inevitably meets with success. Anyhow it succeeded in this instance ! The villagers, five times in number and more powerfully built than the monks, came meekly forward and placed the alms in the shape of raw foodstuffs before them. But the monks being too tired, insisted upon having only cooked food, and they at last had their own way. The uponing had a great laugh over the event and, urged on by a raging appetite, made a hearty feast of the offerings. They discoursed with the villagers on religious subjects, and the villagers were pleased, for in their hearts the people of Bharatavarsha instinctively

Koviloor Digital Library

know that every wandering Sannyâsin embodies in his person the Great Ideals of their ancestors.

Arriving at Tehri, the monks found two rooms, specially built for wandering Sadhus, in a deserted garden. Here on the banks of the Bhagirathi, they lived also on *mâdhukari bhikshâ* and spent all their time in meditation and devotion. Here the Swami became acquainted with Babu Raghunath Bhattacharya, the Dewan of the Tehri Raj and an elder brother of the Pandit Hara Prasad Sastri of Calcutta. At his request the Swami passed several days with him. Everything was done by his host to attend to the wants of the Sannyâsins. The Swami had intended to practise the most intense *sadhana* and *tapas* on the banks of the Ganges there for some time before doing the remainder of the way to Kedar-Badri and perhaps even to Kailas and Thibet. The Dewan himself came forward to help him in his resolve and even settled all arrangements for his practising meditation in Ganesh Prayag, the confluence of the Ganges and the Vilangala rivers. But the tide of intentions was suddenly changed by the collapse of Akhandananda, who had contracted bronchitis. The physician at Tehri ordered him to go down at once to the plains, as the mountain air was proving too rarified for his lungs, and as the winter was approaching. For the sake of his *gurubhai* he at once gave up his cherished desire and being glad to be of assistance to his brothermonk, the Swami with his three companions left for Dehra Dun, many miles away.

But before actually descending towards Dehra Dun he looked back lovingly upon the journey he had made. There, standing on the hill-tops of the Himalayas, his ochre robes swept by the mountain breeze, his staff and *kamandalu* in hand, he fixed his vision far away into the Infinite. His eyes were gazing, as it were, into every nook and corner of his native land. He stood there meditating on the problems of Hindusthan, and then after a prolonged and deep meditation he saw the glory of Bharatavarsha. Various thoughts possessed his mind,—thoughts of sorrow,—and his eyes

Kevilor Digital Library

filled with tears. Then he smiled, for suddenly he seemed to have the vision of the Mother Herself, and a sense of Power and Destiny came over him. In his spiritual vision, the Man of Dakshineswar was in his heart, and, hovering about his soul in his memory were the saints and glories and realisations of Bharatavarsha. And though the snow-clad peaks in which he had delighted were not now visible, he breathed in the freshness of the air which came laden with the peace and silence of their heights. And there in the silence and the peace of Nature in its wild aspects, certain forces were pressing in upon his soul. He seemed to sense in some dim, though nevertheless sure way, what was to be his own destiny in the near future in the way of power and realisation, for he was to become in one sense the Foremost Citizen of the Land, the Glorious Redeemer of its Culture and its Spirit. And he *knew*, in some transcendent method of knowing, that in very truth every particle of the dust of Aryavarta was alive with the sacredness and the inestimable richness of the Dharma.

Leaving Tehri, the monks came to Rajpur, by way of Mussoorie. At Rajpur, some six miles from the broad plains stretching like a great map below, they were startled by seeing a Sannyâsin walking in their neighbourhood, who looked like the Swami Turiyananda. They came closer and closer,—"Yes, it is Hari !" they all cried out together. And there was great rejoicing among the monks at this unexpected meeting with a beloved Brother of theirs, and they talked about the varied fortunes of their wanderings. They all went down to Dehra Dun, where the Swami Akhandananda was immediately taken for the examination of his chest to Dr. Maclaren, the Civil Surgeon, to whom the Swami had brought a letter of recommendation from the Dewan of Tehri. The official had long talks with the Swami on religion, and became an ardent admirer of the group of monks. After careful examination the Doctor advised Akhandananda not to return to the hills but to live carefully in the plains and have good medical treatment. But first of all some

Koviloor Digital Library

shelter had to be found for the sick monk. So the Swami himself went about the town of Dehra Dun, in search of a suitable place, entering many houses, and saying, "My *guru-bhai* is ill ! Can you give him a little place in your house and arrange for suitable diet for him ?" But the Swami only received cold-hearted replies and excuses. Nothing undaunted he went abegging from house to house and at last the Pandit Ananda Narayan, a Kashmiri Brâhman and a vakil of the place, took charge of the sick monk. He rented a small house for him and provided him with suitable diet and warm clothing. The others stayed elsewhere, and begged their meals as fortune favoured them.

During his stay here the Swami met a typical Baniya, who professed to be a great Vedantist and was accustomed to say, "In five minutes I have extracted the whole knowledge of Brahman. There is no universe, either in the past, the present or the future !" But in practice the man was exceedingly miserly. The Swami was amused with him and his pretensions. All the Sadhus who met him spoke of this man as "Miserly Nanda ;" but the Swami won him over in spite of himself, and the man, to the surprise of the other Sadhus, gave him and his brother-monks a feast. Of all the Sadhus he had ever met, the man in the end quite willingly admitted, the Swami was the prince.

Whilst visiting the house of Hridoy Basu, a Christian and a former class-friend of his many years ago, a hot discussion arose between the Swami and the Christian preachers of the place. The Swami spoke to them of the higher criticism of the Bible, something they had never heard of. The Christian missionaries could not withstand the force of his arguments and left the place feeling themselves vanquished. The Swami afterwards begged to be excused by his host for conducting such a discussion in his house against his faith. The manner in which the Swami, here and there, came across those who had known him much earlier in life was very odd ; but in each instance it was a pleasant occurrence and it inevitably gained

Kavilloor Digital Library

for the Swami a new admirer of himself, or a new adherent to his cause.

The Swami remained at Dehra Dun for about three weeks, and then advising Akhandananda to go to a friend's house in Allahabad, and leaving Kripananda to look after him, he with the others went to Hrishikesh. Kripananda joined them a few days later, when Akhandananda went down to Saharanpur on his way to Allahabad. There his host advised him to go to Meerut instead, to the house of his friend, Dr. Trailakya Nath Ghose. So he went there and was under his treatment for a month and a half.

Again in Hrishikesh, the place full of hallowed legends of Hinduism ! Indeed, it is said that here the great Vyasa had his Ashrama, and here he collected and arranged the four Vedas. Hrishikesh is a picturesque and secluded spot, situated on the banks of the Ganges, at the foot of the Himalayas. Thousands of Yogins and Sannyâsins of diverse sects assemble there every year to spend the winter in reading the Scriptures and in practising Yoga and meditation. In those days it was a jungle, covered with groves of wild bamboos, wild plum shrubs and bushes of wild flowers and evergreens ; and here and there it was dotted, as it still is, with thatched cottages raised by the hands of the Sadhus for their habitations. Hrishikesh is situated in a valley surrounded by hills, and the Ganges which almost encircles it, with its pure, transparent, cool currents, breathes incessantly into the ears of the devotees the gentle murmur of the sacred note of renunciation, "Hara, Hara, Hara !" Birds come into the cottages and pick crumbs of bread from the hands of the Sadhus ; and the fishes, in their tameness, snatch morsels of food from the hands of those who feed them. The whole place is monastic ; the very air is pure and holy.

In Hrishikesh the Swami and his *gurubhais* passed a considerable time, dwelling in a hut raised by their own hands, near the temple of Chandeswar Mahadev, and living on *mâdhukari bhikshâ*. Again the resolve of performing severe *sadhanâs* came upon the Swami ; but as ill-luck would have

Koviloor Digital Library

it, hardly had he proceeded with them for a time than a severe illness frustrated all his intentions. One day the *gurubhâis* went into the jungle to cut bamboos for the purpose of extending their huts, and returning, the Swami was suddenly attacked with high fever and diphetheria. He grew worse and worse until his brethren were in terror. One day his pulse sank lower and lower, and the life-blood turned, as it were, into perspiration. His body became cold, his pulse seemed to have stopped. Indeed, it appeared as though the Leader's last moments had come. He lay unconscious on his rude bed composed of a couple of coarse blankets on the ground. His Brothers overwhelmed with grief and anxiety, were at a loss to know what to do. In those days no help could be found within a great distance. While they were thus in the utmost agony of mind, praying that his life be spared and theirs taken in its stead, they heard a faint rustling sound caused by a movement in the grasses outside. And before the entrance of the hut stood a Sadhu. They invited him in, and when he heard the case he brought out from his wallet some honey and powdered Pichul, and mixing them together, forced the medicine into the Swami's mouth. This seemed to be *the* one remedy, a god-send as it were.

After a while the Swami opened his eyes and attempted to speak. One of the *gurubhâis* put his ear near his mouth and heard him utter in a feeble, almost inaudible voice, the words, "Cheer up, my boys ! I shall not die !" Gradually he recovered and later he told his companions that during that unconscious state of his body, he had seen that he had a particular mission in the world which he must fulfil, and that until he had accomplished that mission, he would have no rest. Indeed, his *gurubhâis* marked such a superabundant spiritual energy welling up in him that it seemed he could hardly contain it. He was restless, he felt he must find a proper field for its expression. This then sanctioned, as it were, that which he so deeply felt whilst dwelling in the cave, overhanging the mountain-village, near Almora. Of that

Koviloor Digital Library

time he once said later on, "Nothing in my whole life ever so filled me with the sense of work to be done. It was as if I was *thrown out* from that life of solitude to wander to and fro in the plains below!" Aye, in the plains below he was to work and gather the elements of the mission which had been entrusted to him by the Master.

That experience in Hrishikesh when he lay ill with fever and almost beyond hope of recovery was a great test to the brethren. They realised "who and what" he was to them. The Master had left them, and if *he* should die where would be the Order; what would be their place in life! They would be friendless and alone in the world. Without him their world would be a dark wilderness. And yet the Swami must leave them to their own strength and to their personal realisations. So he determined at least; and as soon as he had recovered he made his way to Hardwar, near at hand. Again he was lost to his *gurubhâis* for a while. At this time Swami Brahmananda was at Kankhal. The other Brothers came down from Hrishikesh and joined him, and then all of them went to Saharanpur, visiting the house of Banku Behari Babu, a pleader of the place. And here they learned that their Leader had gone on to Meerut, and so, they immediately left Saharanpur and went to Meerut.

The Swami who had enjoyed the monastic freedom for a short time, found himself again besieged by his brethren. The latter found him with Akhandananda at the residence of Dr. Trailakya Nath Ghose. It was now past the time of the year when Mother Kali is worshipped, that is, late in the Autumn. The sight of the Leader's sickly countenance frightened the Swami Akhandananda. "I had never seen him thinner," he said. "He was worn to a shadow. It seemed that he had not as yet recovered from his terrible illness at Hrishikesh." For fifteen days the two monks remained with the physician whilst the other brethren stayed at the house of one Yajneshwar Babu. Afterwards, all the Brothers went to live together in the Settji's garden,

Kovilloor Digital Library

the proprietor being a friend of Yajneshwar Babu. The Leader was still taking medicine, for the havoc wrought by his illness was deep. He had been having frequent attacks of fever ever since the night he spent at the *chatti* beyond Almora and his sojourn at Rudra Prayag. There is no doubt that the austerities practised by him during his wandering life and eating food hap-hazardly had weakened him greatly. But at Meerut he gradually grew stronger.

While in the Settji's garden, the Swami Akhandananda brought to him a gentleman, who chanced to be a refugee Sardar and a relative of the Amir of Afghanistan. In coming to see the Swami, this gentleman took the same care as do the Hindus themselves in approaching a Sadhu. He performed his ablutions and then himself carried in his hand a basket of sweetmeats to present to the Swami. During his talk with the Leader he made reference to the well-known Mussulman Fakir of Swat. Many Bengali gentlemen and others came to the garden to hear religious discourse from the Swami's lips. In fact, this garden at Meerut looked like a miniature Baranagore monastery, for here with the Leader were the Swamis Brahmananda, Akhandananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda, Kripananda, and one day the Swami Advaitananda joined the party. Swamiji was now fully restored to health and vigour, and everyday he used to read to them after the noon-day meal the Sanskrit dramas of Mrichchhakatika, Abhijnana Sakuntala and Kumara-Sambhava, as also the Vishnu Purana, in a charming tone, interpreting and explaining the texts in the manner of the *kathakas*. And the monks also held singing parties and regularly practised devotions and meditation even as they did in Baranagore. Thus they spent in Meerut one of the happiest periods of their life.

Being desirous of spending some of the time in close intellectual labour, the Swami went to the local library and secured the works of Sir John Lubbock. But when he returned the volumes on the next day, saying that he had finished them, the librarian argued with him that he had

Kovilloor Digital Library

surely not done so. But the Swami replied, "Sir, I have mastered the whole of them; if you doubt it you may put any question from them to me." Thereupon the librarian examined the monk with the result that he was perfectly satisfied and his astonishment was great. Then the Swami Akhandananda asked, "Swamiji, how could you do it?" The Leader replied, "I never read a book word for word. I read sentence by sentence, sometimes even paragraph by paragraph in a sort of kaleidoscopic form."

After remaining in Meerut for more than three months, the Swami again grew restless. He thought of the life of freedom of those severe types of ascetics in the neighbourhood of Hardwar and Hrishikesh. "I saw many great men in Hrishikesh," said the Swami in later life. "One case that I remember was that of a man who seemed to be mad. He was coming nude down the street, with boys pursuing and throwing stones at him. The whole man was bubbling over with laughter, while blood was streaming down his face and neck. I took him and bathed his wounds, and put the ashes made by burning a piece of cotton cloth upon them to stop the bleeding. And all the time, with peals of laughter, he told me of the fun he and the boys had been having, throwing the stones. 'So the Father plays,' he said."

"Many of these holy men hide in order to guard themselves against intrusion. People are a trouble to them. One had human bones strewn about his cave and gave it out that he lived on corpses. Another threw stones, and so on." The Swami continued: "The Sannyâsin really needs no longer to worship or to go on pilgrimage or perform austerities. What then is the motive of all this going from pilgrimage to pilgrimage, shrine to shrine, and austerity to austerity? He is acquiring merit, and giving it to the world!" Yes, such a life was calling the Leader, not in all the severity of its outward form, but certainly in its spirit, in its desire for realisation and for solitude. His longing to see the Lord and receive His commands became very great, so much so that it struck his *gurubhâis* with awe, and it seemed to them that he

had received Direction. For Swamiji told them that he had decided on the immediate course he was going to follow, and that he had found his mission. He gave out to his brother-monks that he would leave them in order to become the solitary monk and be by himself. When Akhandananda begged to be taken along with him he said, "The Maya of the *gurubhâis* is also Maya, even more so! Thus one is hindered in one's resolutions and attainment of the Goal. I shall have no longer any form of Maya about me!" And so, one morning in the latter part of January, 1891, he left the group of devoted brethren and journeyed on to Delhi by himself.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXVIII

IN BEAUTIFUL ALWAR.

Delhi, the Capital of India for ages under Hindu and Mogul dynasties, the Heart of Empire in India and the scene of numerous historic epochs and of royal splendours, is a city of delights. The royal sepulchres and palaces, the deserted sites of capitals, the ruins of royal and imperial greatness make Delhi the ancient Rome of India. For ten miles it abounds with splendid ruins. And in the very heart of the city rises the Fort, within whose enclosure were the mansions of the Mogul Emperors. There in the distance rises the Jumma Musjid, built by a pious royal family for the benefit of the subjects. The very atmosphere of Delhi is imperial.

Into this city of sovereign memories, the Swami, who was last seen at Meerut, enters with his scant belongings and royal bearing. The crisp air, the grandeur of the place, its memories, its history, its atmosphere fill him with a physical and spiritual elation. Wandering through the streets, his whole soul attuned to the spirit of the place, he at length reached the residence of Shyamal Das Sett, where he was received with open arms, his very appearance winning over the host and the other members of the family. During his sojourn in Delhi he made the acquaintance of Dr. Hem Chandra Sen, at whose house there was a great discussion in the presence of many people, the Swami being acknowledged as a great scholar.

Here in Delhi he went everywhere and saw everything. All the historic sites were visited by him. And in the tombs of princes and of men and women of imperial lineage he pondered over the greatness and the passing of vast empires, and the monk in him was aroused more than the historian, the artist and the patriot. He saw the ephemeral nature of all human glory and was made keenly aware of the Spirit

Kotbar Digital Library

which knows neither coming nor going. His deeper vision saw the incomparable greatness of the Soul and his heart went up to Him Who is the Keeper of the Seals of all history. For his was the monk's life.

How great is the love of the *gurubhâis!* There is no deeper relationship in the world than that which binds *gurubhâis* to one another. Need one wonder, then, that those brethren of the Leader at Meerut could not contain themselves for sheer depression of heart at the loss of him whom they loved most! Need one wonder, then, that in spite of the fact of his having told them that he was going forth alone on the highways of Sannyâsin life they followed him to Delhi! And when they arrived there and saw the Leader, they were exceedingly happy. But he,—he was evidently nonplussed. What could he do! Something in him spurred him on to the life of non-attachment, reaping experience wheresoever and whatsoever it might be. He was happy in Delhi by himself. He was glad to be free and to wander on in a spirit of spiritual restlessness. And somehow he felt that Commands were coming from On High in the way of forcing him to be alone, so that the Spirit which was to be conferred on him could be bestowed all the more intensely. Therefore he said to his *gurubhâis*, "My brethren, I have said that I desired to be left alone. I have said that I have a work to do! I have asked you not to follow me. Now I demand that you obey me! I do not want to be followed. Herewith I leave Delhi! And he who follows me, does so at his peril, for I am going to lose myself to all old associations! Whithersoever the Spirit leads, there shall I wander. It matters not whether it is a forest or a desert waste, a mountainous region or a densely populated city. I am off!"

Thereupon the Leader left Delhi. And though the brethren might have guessed in what direction he had wandered, they DARED not follow him. They knew that his soul was being tossed about in a mad restlessness to find the Goal for which he had been born. They knew instinctively, that the time for the gathering of the contents of his mission

Kaviloor Digital Library

had come. They knew that it was the Guidance of the Master, the Will of the Mother, that he be left alone. And so, bidding him farewell and seeking his blessings, they parted from him with tears in their eyes and a great sadness in their hearts. But the Leader himself was glad. He said to himself, "I must renounce this attachment for those whom I hold to be the dearest. I must cut it out of my heart even as I would an evil. All attachment is poison. Let me travel alone! Whenever I am in such company, a great uneasiness pursues me, lest any one of them fall ill. This is a great obstacle. I must remove ALL hindrances to *tapasya*!" And in his ears resounded constantly the words of the Dhammapada,—

"Go forward without a path!
Fearing nothing, caring for nothing,
Wander alone, like the rhinoceros!
Even as the lion, not trembling at noises,
Even as the wind, not caught in a net,
Even as the lotus-leaf, unstained by the water,
Do thou wander alone, like the rhinoceros!"

This great strength upheld him and inspired him. He was saturated with the spirit of Shiva Himself. Renouncing all ties, breaking all bondages, tearing asunder all limitations, destroying all sense of fear, the Leader went forth, even as the rhinoceros—into the direction of Alwar, in the beautiful and historic land of Rajputana.

Rajputana! What Memories of heroes and grand chivalry does the very name awaken! How the Indian heart throbs at the very mention of the word! In Rajputana Indian history has, as it were, intensified itself. Here reigned dynasties upon dynasties of Lions,—those Rajput princes,—who defied even the victorious arms of Akbar; and here were women, each of whom was as a queen. Alwar is the pearl of the cities of Rajputana. Surrounded by hills, it is lovely to look upon and in the distant west there is a range of rugged peaks. The peacocks, those emblems of imperial power and imperial splendour, roam in a wild state of

Kovilpur Digital Library

nature ; the palaces of the Maharajah are built of marble, and the land is rich and beautiful.

One morning in the beginning of February, 1891, the Swami alighted from the train at the Alwar railway station. Walking along the public road, fringed with gardens and verdant fields, and passing a row of beautiful mansions, he finally arrived in front of the State Dispensary, where seeing a Bengali gentleman standing at the door-step he took him to be the Doctor in charge, which proved to be true. His name was Guru Charan Laskar, and when the Swami addressed him in his mother-tongue, asking if there was a place where Sannyâsins could put up, he was beside himself with joy. For many, many days he had not heard his Mother-tongue spoken ; and besides, he was impressed by the remarkable appearance of the Sadhu. Bowing low before him, he joyfully accompanied the Swami to the bazaar where he showed him a room in the upper story of one of the shops and said, "This is for Sannyâsins, Sir ! Can you make yourself comfortable here for the present?" "Gladly !" responded the Swami. And seeing after the Swami's immediate needs, the Doctor hastened to the house of a Mohammedan friend, a teacher of Urdu and Persian in the High School of the place, and said to him, "O Moulavi Sahib ! A Bengali Dervish has just arrived ! Come immediately and see him ! This man is surely a real Mahatma. I have never seen the like of him before !" And as soon as it was possible, both hurried to the bazaar, and taking the shoes from off their feet, entered the bare room in which the Swami had arranged his few things, and saluted him with reverence. At this time the Swami's sole belongings consisted of a few books tied up in a blanket, a piece of yellow cloth, a *kamandalu* and a staff.

As soon as they entered, the Swami called the follower of the Prophet to his side and spoke with much love to them of religious matters. And in the course of conversation he said to the Mohammedan, "There is one thing very remarkable about the Koran. Even to this day, it exists as it was found eleven hundred years ago. It retains its pristine purity and

Koviloor Digital Library

is free from interpolations." Both the visitors were much impressed, and Guru Charan returning to his dispensary, spoke to everyone of "a great monk" who had just come. "He is learned beyond words," he said. "O he is an inspired Mahatma!" And those who heard the physician's words were transported with his enthusiasm and desiring to see this Master, they went to the room in the bazaar where the Swami was. The Moulavi likewise told all his Moslem friends, and they also came in numbers. Soon a great concourse of people gathered, and the Swami held discourse with them. Often his room was crowded, and even the verandahs. He would intersperse his conversations with songs. Now he would sing Urdu songs, now Hindi *bhajana*, and sometimes Bengali *kirtana*. Or he would delight the audience with songs from the great saints, Vidyapati, Chandidas and Ramprasad. Or he would charm the listeners with recitations from the Vedas and the Upanishads, from the Koran, the Bible and the Puranas. Or he would enthuse them spiritually with the stories from the lives of the saints, such as, Buddha, Sankara, Ramanuja, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Tulsidas, Kabir and Ramakrishna, in the course of illustrating the teachings of the Scriptures.

After a few days, the number of devotees and admirers became so great that some well-to-do men of Alwar arranged that he should stay at the house of Pandit Sambhunathji, a retired engineer of the Alwar State. Here the Swami regulated his life, remaining by himself in prayer and meditation from the early morning until the hour of nine, when he emerged from his room generally to find some twenty to thirty people awaiting him. These were of all castes, creeds and classes. Some were Sunnis and Shiahs of the Mohammedan fold, some were Shaivaites and Vaishnavites. Some were men of wealth and position and learning; others were illiterate and poor. Swamiji would go on talking to them without distinction and answering their queries till it was noon. There was absolute freedom between him and those who came. If one asked an irrelevant question interrupting

Koviloor Digital Library

this flow of eloquence on some highest metaphysical subject, by saying, "Maharaj, to what caste does your body belong?" he would immediately reply without being vexed or annoyed, "It is Kayastha!" Some monks would have evaded a direct reply, hoping to be taken as a Brâhman, but the Swami was above what people thought of his caste. When hearing his luminous conversations full of brilliant thoughts and his rhapsodies of song, the most learned Brâhmans felt they would be blessed if they were accepted as his disciples, for they knew that Krishna and Buddha were non-Brâhmans, even as the man before them. Another, again, would ask him, "Sire, why do you wear *gerrua*?" To which he would reply, "Because this is the garb of beggars! Poor people ask me for alms if I wear white clothes, and being a beggar myself I do not have at most times even a single pice with me to give them. And then it causes me pain to have to refuse one who begs of me. But seeing my *gerrua* cloth, they understand that this man is a beggar even as one of them, and they would not think of begging from beggars." This is, indeed, the most original and touching explanation of wearing the Sannyâsin's robe, for the popular saying is, "Without *bheka*, or distinguishing garb of renunciation, no *bhikshâ*, or alms, is available."

Another day, the conversation would centre upon the Blessedness of Mother-worship, and his heart would become too full, till he could no longer speak except repeating only, "Mother! Mother!" And his chanting of the Mother's name, in a voice which was at first loud and full, gradually became softer and softer as though it, too, were travelling with his soul—far, far away. And his voice would become more and more subdued,—until finally it would die away, and the Swami with his eyes closed would shed tears of joy, being very, very close to the Mother's heart in the intimacy of the spiritual communion. And in a frenzy of ecstasy the eyes of the devotees also would be filled with tears and they would cry out wildly and more wildly, "Jaya Mâ Kâli! Jaya Mâ Kâli!" And then the Swami would

Koviloor Digital Library

begin to sing, and it seemed as if the very fountain of the Love of God was welling up from his heart, carrying the devotees in its flow. And in the afternoon, and particularly at evening time, the same ecstasy of song and prayer and conversation would occur, and often many of those who were present would join with the Swami in singing songs of praise to the Lord. But the Swami would sometimes break the strain caused by the talks on serious metaphysical matters and the ecstasy of devotion, by speaking on the history of different countries and their peculiar manners and customs in a way which would send his audience into roars of laughter.

There was a certain day among others when the Swami sang songs pertaining to the Brindaban Leela of Sri Krishna. As he sang, tears flowed down his cheeks. The audience wept with the very love of God. And some, looking upon the face of the monk would think, "O, our Babaji is enjoying a vision of Sri Krishna! O, how he carries our hearts away by his singing!" And another would say, "This is, indeed, a manifestation of Divine glory. Certainly, he is a seer of God!" Finally, the Swami's voice was choked by intensity of feeling and his body became like stone; his face was reflecting an unspeakable sweetness, resplendent with the Love for God. Indeed, as is said by one who was present, "His face looked like that of a Gopi as if overflowing with the ecstasy of Love in the company of the Loved One. Swamiji used to translate the Bengali songs before he sang them and those who heard these songs committed them to memory and noted them down in the Devanagri character, lest they forgot them.

Days would slip by in this manner, none of those present and neither the Swami himself being conscious of the time. Sometimes the meetings would continue till late at night, and even until the midnight hours. And coming away from the house of Pandit Sambhunathji, the devotees would say to one another, "O, our Babaji is full of Anandam. His voice is like silver. There is an electric power in his voice which, to say the least, is fascinating. How sweet he is! He never gets

Kovilpur Digital Library

annoyed! O, why is one so anxious to meet him again and again! One would love to be with him ALWAYS. Now we see how adorable was Sri Krishna!" Everybody without exception became attached to the Swami. Everybody thought himself to be the Swami's favourite. The learned as well as the rich sought him as much as the illiterate and the poor. But the Swami's love and sympathy were bent in a greater degree upon the latter, for he was like a father to them. He initiated some, giving them *mantrams* and showing the paths of their Ishtams unto them.

Among all his friends the Moulavi Sahib was one of the most devoted. He had a strong desire to invite him to his house and give him *bhikshâ*. He said to himself, "Well, Swamiji is a great dervish. He has no distinction of caste. But then Panditji with whom he is staying may object." With this thought he went to Panditji and his monk-guest one evening, and before all present said with folded palms: "Do allow me to have the Babaji in my house for his meal tomorrow! And to satisfy you all I will remove all furniture from my sitting-room and have it washed by Brâhmans; and the food which Swamiji will be offered in that room will be purchased and cooked by Brâhmans in the utensils brought from their homes." And he added, "This Yavana will only see him taking his meals, from a distance, and feel highly favoured." The Moulavi spoke these words with such sincere humility that all present were amused, and Panditji clasped his hand in friendship and said to him in answer, "My friend, Swamiji is a dervish! What is caste to him! There is no necessity for your taking such great trouble. I, for my part, have no objection. Any arrangement you may make will satisfy us. Indeed, in such an arrangement as you propose, I myself can have no qualms of conscience in partaking of a meal at your house, what to speak of Swamiji who is a Mukta!" Everyone admired the sincerity of the fine man. And so it happened that the Moulavi Sahib entertained the Swami in his own house and felt himself blessed. Seeing Moulavi Sahib entertain the Hindu

Kovilloor Digital Library

Sannyâsin at his home, many other devout Mohammedan friends also eagerly invited the Swami to their houses and fed him in like manner.

By and by, the Dewan to the Maharajah of Alwar chanced to hear of the presence of "a great Sadhu" in the city, and so he invited him to his house. On becoming more and more acquainted with him, Major Ramchandraji, for such was his name, felt that the Swami would be a great influence in changing the bent of mind of the Maharajah, Mangal Singhji, who had become much Anglicised in his habits of thought and in his manners. With this thought he wrote to the Maharajah, who was at that time living in a palace two or three miles distant, saying, "A great Sadhu has come who has a stupendous knowledge of English." The very next day the Maharajah came to the city, and coming to the Dewan's house he met the Swami and bowed down before him, cordially inviting him to take his seat.

To understand the nature of the conversation which followed, it is necessary to understand the position which the great Sannyâsins who are *siddhapurushas*, or perfected souls, hold in the Hindu world. These men, even as the *rishis* or seers of old, have no fear of thrones or of powers, and stand before the princes of the earth as lions before all other animals. And the greatest of Indian princes knows well the worth of a real Sadhu, one who is a Mahâtman, and pays homage to him. And such was the Swami.

Almost the first words uttered by the Maharajah were, "Well, Swamiji Maharaj, I hear that you are a great scholar. You can easily earn a handsome sum of money every month. Why then do you go about begging?' And the Swami replied with a question which came as a home thrust. "Maharaj", he said, "tell me why do you spend your time constantly in the company of the Westerners and go on shooting excursions neglecting your duties to the State?" The courtiers who were present were taken aback. "What a bold Sadhu! He will repent of this," they thought with bated breath. But the Maharajah took it calmly, and thinking awhile said, "I

Koviloor Digital Library

cannot say why, but no doubt because I like to !" "Well, for that very same reason, do I wander about as a Fakir," the Swami exclaimed.

The next question the Maharajah asked was, "Well, Babaji Maharaj, I have no faith in idol-worship. What is going to be my fate ?" And he smiled as he spoke. The Swami expressed doubt as to whether he meant what he said, and exclaimed, "What ! you are joking !" But the Maharajah replied, "No, Swamiji, not at all ! You see, I really cannot worship wood, earth, stone or metal, like other people. Does this mean that I shall fare worse in the life hereafter ?" The Swami made answer, "Well, I suppose, every man according to his own faith !" And those who were devotees of the Swami, on hearing this thought, "How could Swamiji have given sanction to the want of faith in image-worship on the part of the Maharajah ! How inconsistent ! For have we not seen him fall to the ground with tears flowing from his eyes in sheer ecstasy, losing himself in *bhâva* on seeing the Image of Sri Vihariji !" And naturally their minds grew dark with doubt.

But just then the Swami startled the whole audience by one of his brilliant hits. He told someone to bring down from the wall a photograph of the Maharajah which his eyes chanced to see, and taking it in his hand asked, "Whose picture is this ?" And the Dewan answered, "It is the likeness of our Maharajah." But all were puzzled, wondering what the Swami meant. A moment later they were beside themselves with wild fear when the Swami asked the Dewan to spit upon it. "Spit upon it !" cried out the Swami. "Any one of you may spit upon it. What is it, but a piece of paper ? What objection can there be on your part to do so ?" The Dewan was thunder-struck, and the eyes of every one glanced to and fro in terror and awe, from the Prince to the monk and from the monk to the Prince. But all the while the Swami insisted, "Spit upon it ! I say, spit upon it !" And the Dewan in fear and in bewilderment, cried out, "What ! Swamiji ! What are you telling me to do ? This is the like-

Kovilpur Digital Library

ness of our Maharajah ! How can I do such a thing ?" And then the Swami spoke, "Be it so, but the Maharajah is not bodily present in this photograph. This is only a piece of paper. It does not contain his bones and flesh and blood. It does not speak or behave or move in any way as does the Maharajah. And yet all of you refuse to spit upon it, because you see in this photo the shadow of the Maharajah's form. Indeed, in spitting upon this photo, you feel that you insult your master, the Prince himself." The Dewan and others breathed a sigh of relief. And then the monk turning to the Maharajah said, "See, Your Highness, though this is not you in one sense, in another sense it *is* you. Therefore these, your devoted servants, were so perplexed when I asked them to spit upon your photo. It has this shadow of you; it brings you into their minds. One glance at it makes them *see* YOU in it ! Therefore they look upon it with as much respect as they do upon your own person. Thus it is with the devotees who worship stone and metal Images of Gods and Goddesses. It is because an Image brings to their minds their *Ishtam*, or some special form and attributes of the Divinity, and helps the concentration of their thoughts making them partake of the Divine nature, that the devotees worship God in an Image. They do not worship the stone or the metal as such. I have travelled in many places, but nowhere have I found a single Hindu worshipping an Image, saying, 'O Stone ! I worship Thee ! O Metal ! Be merciful to me !' Everyone is worshipping, O Maharajah, the same one God, who is the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of Pure Knowledge. And God appears to all, even according to their understanding and their representation of Him. Prince, I speak for myself ! Of course I cannot speak for you !" And Mangal Singhji who had been listening attentively all this time said, with folded hands, "Sire ! I must admit that according to the light you have thrown upon Image-worship, I have never yet met anyone who has worshipped stone, or wood, or metal. Heretofore I have not understood its meaning ! You have opened my eyes !"

Kovilpur Digital Library

When the Swami arose to take his departure, Mangal Singhji said, "Have mercy on me, Maharaj !" The Swami answered, "O Prince, none but God can be merciful to one, and He is Ever-Merciful ! Pray to Him. He will show His Mercy unto you !"

After the Swami had taken leave, Mangal Singhji remained thoughtful for a while and then said, "Dewanji, never have I come across such a Mahâtmâ ! Make him stay with you for some time." The Dewan promised to do his best, adding, "Sire ! He is a man of a fiery and independent character. He may not desire to remain with me, but I shall seek him out !" After many entreaties the monk consented to live with the Dewan, but only under one condition,—that all those people, poor and illiterate, who often came to him, should have the right to see him freely whensoever they desired, even as the rich and those of higher positions were so privileged. The Dewan readily agreed to it, and so the Swami went to stay with him.

During this time there were many who visited the Swami who had their lives completely changed as the result of having come into contact with him. There was an old man, however, who came daily, constantly asking him for his blessings and his mercy. Accordingly the Swami instructed him in certain practices, but he would follow none of these. Finally, when he had come day after day only asking his mercy, the Swami became impatient with him, and one day seeing the man coming at a distance and wishing to get rid of him, he assumed an attitude of extreme reserve. He did not give answer to the scores of questions put to him by the old man, and even did not say in reply one word to his many friends there when spoken to. They could not understand what was the matter with him. An hour and a half passed in this way and Swamiji sat in the same statuesque repose as before, without even once winking his eyes ! The old man at last got angry and annoyed, and left the place swearing to himself. Swamiji then burst out into boyish laughter in which all present also joined. A young man asked

Kovilpur Digital Library

him, "Babaji Maharaj, why were you so hard on that old man?" Swamiji turning to him and the other young men who sat near said lovingly, "Dear sons, I am ready to sacrifice my life for you, young men! You will try your best to do what I may advise you, and you have also the power to do it. Here is this old man who has spent nine-tenths of his life in running after the pleasures of the senses. Now he is incapacitated for either the spiritual or the worldly life and wants to have God's mercy for the mere asking! What is needed is *purushkâra*, or manly personal exertion to attain Truth. How can God have mercy on one who is devoid of *purushkâra*? He who is wanting in manliness is full of *tamas*. It was because Arjuna, the bravest of warriors, was going to lose manliness that Sri Krishna taught the Gita to him and commanded him to do his *swadharma*, so that by fulfilling his duties without attachment to results, he would acquire the qualities of *satva*, such as the purification of heart, renunciation of all work, and self-surrender. Be strong! Be manly! I have a respect even for one who is wicked, so long as he is manly and strong, for his strength will make him some day give up his wickedness or even give up all works for selfish ends, and will thus eventually bring him into the Truth."

Following the Swami's instructions many young men of Alwar applied themselves to the study of Sanskrit. At times Swamiji used to teach it to them himself. And in doing so he told them, "Study Sanskrit, but along with it study Western Science as well. Learn accuracy, my boys! Study and labour, so that the time will come when you can put our history on a scientific basis. For now Indian history is disorganised. We have no chronological accuracy. The histories of our country by English writers cannot but be weakening to our minds, for they hold prominently before our view the picture of our downfall. How can foreigners who understand very little of our manners and customs, our religion and philosophy, write faithful and unbiased histories of Bharatavarsha? Naturally, many false notions

Koviloor Digital Library

and wrong inferences have found their way into them. But the Europeans have shown us how to proceed in making researches into our ancient history. Now it is for us to strike out an independent path for ourselves in these departments of learning. Study the Vedas and the Puranas and the ancient annals of India, and from these make it your life's *sadhana* to write accurate, sympathetic and soul-inspiring histories of the land. Study the life of Shivaji and you will find him a nation-maker, instead of a marauder, as the Europeans represent him. We should not be guided absolutely by the histories produced by European minds. What respect can they have for our culture which they do not understand? In point of fact we have no connected history from the Vedic times down to a period of a thousand years after Lord Buddha. Of course, now a new era is dawning in this respect. But IT IS FOR INDIANS TO WRITE INDIAN HISTORY. Therefore set yourselves to the task of rescuing our lost and hidden treasures from oblivion! Even as one whose child has been lost does not rest until he has found it, so do you never cease to labour until you have redeemed the glorious Past of India in the consciousness of the people. That will be the true national education, and with its advancement a true national spirit will be awakened!" The Swami loved these young men of Alwar. He hoped for them; he prayed for them. And inspired by his fiery words they grew strong in their love for the Motherland, and they looked upon him as MASTER.

One day he asked if there were any Sadhus in the place, and being informed that there was an old Brahmachârin who lived some distance away, he went to see him in the company of some of his admirers. But evidently this man was a Vaishnava with a violent dislike for Sadhus of the Vedantic school, for as soon as the Swami entered he began to abuse the *gerrua* and the Sannyâsin life in a vehement outburst of fanaticism. But the Swami remained silent, asking to be taught concerning God and religion. The Brahmachârin finding his purpose defeated, said, "Well, let

Kovilloor Digital Library

that go. I have no anger against you. Have something to eat." But on the Swami respectfully declining by saying that he had had his food just before coming to him, the Sadhu again grew furious and cried out, "Get away !" The Swami bowing down before him, took his leave. When he emerged from the Ashrama, he laughed outright. "Hallo ! what a peculiar Sadhu you have shown me ! What a grumpy old man !" he exclaimed to his companions. And he laughed more and more, imitating the Brahmâcharin and the manner of speech with which he had overwhelmed him, and his companions joined in his merry-making.

The Swami's personality endeared everyone to him, and his thoughtful solicitation for each of his admirers made them literally adore him. There was a Brâhman boy who often came to him and who loved him as a disciple loves his master. It was about the time when he should have had the ceremony of the investiture of the sacred thread performed, but he had no means, being exceedingly poor. When the Swami heard of this he could not rest. Day after day he thought of the plight of the boy and spoke to the well-to-do class of his devotees, saying, "I have one thing to beg of you. Here is a Brâhman boy who is too poor to support himself and has no money with which to meet the expenses for his *upanayana*, or the sacred thread ceremony. As householders it is your duty to help this boy. You ought to arrange if you can to raise a subscription in his behalf. It is unbecoming for a Brâhman boy of his age not to know the obligatory religious duties of his caste. Moreover, it will be very good of you if you can provide for his education also." Hearing this, the devotees hastened to raise a subscription. The Swami left the place shortly after this, but one can see from the first letter that he wrote to one of his friends at Alwar a month later that he did not forget the case of the Brâhman boy, for he begins the letter enquiring if his *upanayana* ceremony was performed.

So the days grew into weeks, and when seven weeks had passed by in this method of teaching and training in Alwar,

Koviloor Digital Library

the Swami felt the *parivrâjaka* Call. Indeed, he had felt it shortly after his arrival there; but his admirers pressed him hard to stay, and so he had stayed. But now he felt that it was not right, and he said to his friends, "I must be going! A Sannyâsin must always be on the move." And so he left, bidding farewell to his devoted disciples and *bhaktas*, who could not bear the thought of parting with him. It affected him much also to leave, for those who loved him fell at his feet, with tears in their eyes. This was on the twenty-eighth of March, 1891. And when the people of Alwar saw him last, his hands were raised in benediction and upon his lips was the Name of the Lord! With an effort of his soul he quieted the sadness which had come over him. He, the Teacher, must always wander, teaching, preaching and helping mankind everywhere,—with the Spirit of the Lord within his heart.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXIX

WITH THE MAHARAJAH OF KHETRI.

When the Swami left Alwar his soul felt in some manner as did those of the early Apostles of Christianity when they took leave of the close circle of friends they had made in the different cities through which they wandered and in which they preached. Like them, the Swami was building up churches, as it were, and gathering round him sincere devotees. His friends insisted that he must travel by a *ratha*, or bullock-cart with a top-covering, at least to the next stage, called Pandupol, some eighteen miles from Alwar, so as to avoid the heat and the lonely paths. Indeed, several of his disciples begged to be allowed to accompany him at least some fifty or sixty miles. At first he objected, and then owing to their earnest pleading and to give them some consolation, he consented to their wishes.

At Pandupol there is a well-known temple, dedicated to Hanumanji. Arriving at this village the Swami proceeded at once to the temple. The Image brought back to his mind the stories of the Ramayana which had thrilled him in his childhood. He remained some time in silent meditation before the Image of Mahavira; that night he slept in the temple-compound. On the following morning he decided to abandon the bullock-cart for the sake of *sadhana*, and so he and his party went on foot some sixteen miles to a village known by the name of Tahla. The journey was through a wild mountainous region, infested with wild beasts. But the party went on merrily, as the Swami entertained his friends with stories, now amusing, now serious, and all the time a feeling of blessedness was with them. The forests resounded with songs which the Swami now and then sang, and in the wilderness the party sometimes paused to meditate by the side of a rapid stream and underneath large, spreading trees,

Koviloor Digital Library

upon the beauty and the glory of the free life of the monks. Thus they arrived at Tahla.

In this village there is a temple dedicated to Nilakantha Mahâdeva. Wonderful is the story of this aspect of Shiva. It is told how at one time the *devas* finding their splendours fading, went to Vishnu, the God of gods for advice. He told them to churn the Ocean. And so making Mount Meru the great churning-rod, founded upon the Divine Tortoise as a base, the *devas* or gods and the *asuras*, or demons, catching hold, respectively, of the tail and head of the great snake Ananta twisted round the Mount Meru as the rope, commenced churning the ocean. The demons had chosen the head of the snake as their end, believing that the head was better than the tail; but they did not calculate the dangerous effects of the poisonous odours which the snake exhaled. And so the churning went on. Now a great horse, now a magnificent elephant, now a stately chariot, now a beautiful maiden, now some priceless jewels issued forth from out of the seething mass. And both the *devas* and the *asuras* seized what they could. Then, all of a sudden, something arose, black as night and terrible as death; it was prodigious in volume, hovering like a thick cloud over the ocean and soon covering the whole extent of the earth. The ocean itself became dark and also the sky. Breathing became a torture. It was poison, terrible poison, whose very odour was fatal to life. Now the gods were in a great dilemma; everywhere it was dark and something terrible seemed to pursue them. They felt they were in the very presence of death. In their terrible agony, they appealed to Vishnu, who advised them to seek Shiva for refuge, saying that none but He could deliver them. Mahadeva had remained indifferent to the prizes, sitting far away in His abode in silent meditation. On hearing their cry for aid, the Great Lord arose, and coming near the waters, bade the gods be at peace. And bending down to the waters He scooped the poison into the palm of His hand. Strange to say, all that poison condensed itself therein. And then lifting it to His mouth, while the *asuras* thought He would be instantly

Koviloor Digital Library

killed, Mahadeva, ready to sacrifice himself for all living beings, swallowed the whole of the venomous draught. And that which would have been fatal to the army of the gods and demons and to all the creatures of the universe only stained the fair throat of the Great God with a blue mark, but which became an ornament to Him. And for this reason Shiva Mahadeva has received the name of Nilakantha, or the Blue-Throated One. For this reason also He is called Mrityunjaya, or the Conqueror of Death. He was so powerful, and so great was His spirit that nothing physical could harm Him.

And the Swami read into this story the power of the Maya of the universe and that of the realisation of the monk. All beings who dwell within the folds of earthly consciousness, churn the ocean of Maya, which is human life, receiving endless treasures, that are pleasing to the senses. But soon the poison,—the death of the soul—must come. The monk, however, stands apart. Absorbed in the Self he desires none of the enticing gifts which Maya offers; but like Mahadeva, he is ready to come to the assistance of those who lust after sense pleasures, when in the presence of death, the terrible, they approach him for the deliverance of their souls. Then he destroys the Maya for them and relieves the world of the fear and the presence of death, showing by his acts that Death has no terrors for the Soul of Realisation. How wonderful the tale! How under the guise of legend it narrates the struggle of the soul, burdened with the influence of desire! Not until the body-idea is overcome can there be peace. And the Swami, seated himself in meditation posture before the Image, pondered upon the greatness of its symbolism, desiring like Mahadeva to renounce all and embrace death, and saying in his inmost heart, "I am one with the Indestructible!"

The next morning, the Swami walked on some eighteen miles further to the village called Narayani, where the Mother is worshipped under one of Her many Forms. Here, every year a great *melâ* or fair is held, and from all parts of Rajputana people come to worship this living Image of the Divine Mother. Here he parted from his friends and travelled

Koviloor Digital Library

on by himself to the next village called Bosoweh, some sixteen miles distant. There he took the train for the city of Jeypore, whither he had been pressed to come by a devotee who was privileged to meet him in Alwar. Having heard from his Alwar friends that Swamiji was on his way, this gentleman was waiting at the Bandikui station to meet his honoured guest, and boarded the train on his arrival there. And on the train he and the monk spoke on those same topics which had stirred the soul of the man in the city of Alwar and which had made him the Swami's disciple. At Jeypore, the disciple insisted that the Swami should pose for a photograph. Everybody in Alwar had been asking for a photograph of him and had requested him to have it taken. So, against his wishes, the Swami finally consented to have himself photographed for the edification of his disciples. And this was the first time that a picture of the Swami had been taken as the wandering monk, and it was a picture, all-powerful with the Spirit of the *parivrâjaka*.

However firm the determination of the Swami might have been to lead the life of the unknown monk, and however stern might have been his command to his *gurubhâis* not to follow him, Akhandananda could not control the feeling he bore with regard to the Leader. He must seek him out, he thought. So he journeyed on to Jeypore, finding that he had left Alwar, and repaired to that place, "chasing" the Swami. But he did not know anything definite. He was wide-awake, therefore, when he heard from someone that a great Bengali Sadhu was staying at the palace of the Maharajah. He inferred "who" it might be, but there was still a shadow of doubt. When he heard, however, that the Sadhu spoke English with great fluency and that he was learned in the Western and the Eastern philosophies, he made up in his mind that it must be the Leader. At the very first opportunity which presented itself he appeared before him and found him conversing with a group of devotees. The Leader took no notice of him. When the group dispersed, he called his *gurubhâi* to his side and in stern and violent language charged him never to

Koviloor Digital Library

appear before him again. He threatened him and terrorised him ; and Akhandananda, with still greater love and admiration for the Swami in his heart, left Jeypore sorrowfully, knowing that the Leader had a great purpose in his mind in sending him away. And he gained strength from the inspiration and power of the Leader, and went out to follow himself the same kind of life.

The Swami remained at Jeypore for two weeks, during which time he met a famous Sanskrit grammarian, and decided to study under him Panini's *Ashtâdhyâyi*, the grammar on the classical language of the Vedas. Somehow or other, though the Pandit was one of the most learned in this subject, he had not so much the faculty of teaching it clearly. For three days he went on explaining to the Swami the commentary on the first *sutra*, or aphorism, but could not make it intelligible to him. On the fourth day, the Pandit said, "Swamiji, I am afraid, you won't derive much benefit from being my pupil, as in three days I could not make you grasp the meaning of this *sutra*." Feeling himself keenly reproved by the Pandit, the Swami determined to master the commentary by himself. He decided not to eat or sleep until he had mastered its import. And so he set himself to the task, with the marvellous result that in three hours' time he accomplished what the Pandit could not do even in three days! Shortly after he went to the Pandit and in a casual way explained the text of the commentary and its purport. The Pandit was amazed ; he was actually dumbfounded when he saw the Swami interpreting it with a remarkable clearness of insight. After this the Swami proceeded to readily grasp the meaning of *sutra* after *sutra* and chapter after chapter. Later on he said of this experience, "It is all a question of determination. If the mind is intensely eager, everything can be accomplished."

Being restless and also desirous of moving on, the Swami next went to the celebrated hill-resort of Mount Abu, where stands perhaps one of the most wonderful temples in Hindusthan, being built in the early part of the thirteenth century

Koviloor Digital Library

and costing about five million pounds. For its delicacy of carving and beauty of detail it stands perhaps unrivalled in the land. It was erected by two pious brothers, merchant-princes, and is said to have taken fourteen years to build. It is a Jaina temple and was erected in the time when the Jaina religion was in a flourishing state. There is yet another temple at this place, built even earlier, in the eleventh century, by another Jaina merchant-prince. Interested as he was in Jainaism, the Swami spent days in examining the glory of these temples, transforming himself into a Jaina, as it were, for the time, and his patriotic soul was proud that India should have produced such a wondrous work of art. When not wandering through the temples he strolled about the beautiful lake, the treasure of Mount Abu. And by the lake are rocks of strange shapes, one like a praying nun and another like a toad about to spring into the waters, and so on. The whole place seemed to him like a Garden of the Gods. Remaining amidst the delightful surroundings of Mount Abu for some time, the Swami next proceeded to Ajmere, replete with the memories of the magnificence of its Hindu and Mogul rulers. Here the Swami visited the palace of Akbar and the famous Dargah, sacred alike to Hindu and Mohammedans, being the burial-place of the renowned Moslem saint, Chisti. Here he visited also the temple to the Creator, Brahmâ, the only one of its kind in India.

On the fourteenth of April, 1891, the Swami left Ajmere proceeding again to Mount Abu, and here destiny put it into his path to meet the Maharajah of Khetri. He had made many friends in Mount Abu, including the vakil of the Rajah of Kotah and of Thakur Fateh Sing, late minister of that Prince. When he was staying with one of them an admirer of his brought Munshi Jagmohanlal, B.A., the Private Secretary to the Maharajah of Khetri, to see him. As it happened, the Swami was resting at the time, having on only a *kaupina* and a piece of cloth. When the educated visitor saw the sleeping monk, he thought, "O here is one of those common Sadhus who are no better than thieves or rogues!" Presently

Koviloor Digital Library

the Swami awoke. He had been teaching the whole morning. From the long conversation which Munshi Jagmohanlal had with Swamiji, his false notions of Sannyâsin life was eradicated and he felt himself converted, being convinced of the greatness of the Dharma. Much impressed, Jagmohanlalji determined that the Maharajah himself should make acquaintance with the Swami. He said, "Swamiji, do come with me to the palace of the Maharajah, to whom I shall introduce you." But the monk made answer, "Very well, I will go on the day after to-morrow." Jagmohanlalji after returning to his Prince, stated all that had happened. And the Maharajah on hearing him was so anxious to meet the Swami that he said, "I will go myself and see him." But when the monk heard this he himself went instantly to the palace.

When he arrived, His Highness warmly welcomed him and after the usual formalities asked him, "Swamiji, what is life?" The monk replied, "Sire, life is the tendency of the unfoldment and development of a being under circumstances tending to press it down." The Swami's own life was one of hardship and renunciation, and so he put a world of feeling into what he spoke. Impressed, the Maharajah next asked, "Well, Swamiji, what then is education?" And the immediate response came, "Sire, I should say, education is the nervous association of certain ideas." And he went on to explain the statement, saying that not until ideas had been made instincts could they be reckoned as real and vital possessions of consciousness. Then he narrated the life of Ramakrishna to the Maharajah, who sat listening to him eagerly and attentively, his soul wrapt in a flame of burning passion for truth as he heard the words of spiritual nectar fall from the Swami's lips. He told the Prince how perfect was his Master's education of the soul in the matter of renunciation of lust and gold, how the simple touch of a coin with his body, even when he was asleep, would bring on a painful contortion of his physical self, how he looked upon every woman as the Mother, indeed, how his whole life was a deification of human personality, and was an example and an

Koviloor Digital Library

incentive to men, in the purification of the contents of their individual selves. "His whole life", said the Swami, "was a manifestation of purity, an education to the perfection of the Highest Consciousness of man.

For days the Maharajah listened to the monk's words of wisdom, and then, having become devotedly attached to him, he said, "Swamiji, do come with me to my State! You will live with me there, and I shall serve you with my whole heart." The Swami reflected for a moment and said, "Very well, Maharajah, I shall be glad to accompany you." Several days after the Prince and his retinue left the beautiful Mount Abu and journeyed by train to Jeypore, the Swami joining him as promised. From Jeypore to Khetri, the distance of ninety miles was done in a state carriage. On the way the Prince spent his time in the company of the Swami, asking him questions, and hearing his answers. Thus the Maharajah asked, "Swamiji, what is Truth?" And the monk replied, "Truth, Maharajah, is One and Absolute; man travels constantly towards it, from truth to truth and not from error to truth." And then he went on, amplifying his meaning, pointing out how all forms of knowledge and experience and all forms of worship and of thought are paths towards the Summit of the Mountain of Truth. He showed how the true monk and the true householder could attain the same Truth through separate paths. Never in his life had the Maharajah met a man or a Sannyâsin of this type. He was delighted with his company. On reaching Khetri, the Swami, after some days, initiated the Prince as a disciple. And what a wonderful disciple he became! Still are there memories of him, kneeling in reverence before the Swami Vivekananda; and the Swami, in his turn, knowing the depth and the sincerity of the man loved him dearly and expected much of him in the way of advancing the well-being of the country. Whilst in America in later times he kept him acquainted with his progress and made him the privileged one of many by writing him some of his marvellous letters, which convey to the reader glimpses of the remarkable

Kovilpoor Digital Library

greatness of the Swami himself and of the unbounded respect which the Prince paid to him.

The Swami passed many weeks with the Maharajah, studying, teaching and living the spiritual life. Though in a palace, he nevertheless lived as the monk that he was; constantly communing with his soul and with his Master, and ever watchful of the guidance of the Mother. At the palace he became acquainted with Pandit Narayandas, who was the foremost Sanskrit grammarian of his time in Rajputana. Believing this to be a great opportunity, the Swami decided to study the Mahâbhâshyam, which is Patanjali's great commentary on the Sutras of Panini. The Pandit was pleased to teach the monk, and even after the first day he remarked, "Swamiji, it is very difficult to get a student like you!" One day it happened that the Pandit, who had given a long lesson on the day previous, questioned the Swami about the subject taught. To his surprise the monk quoted verbatim the whole day's task from memory, adding his own comments to the topic of thought. After a time the Pandit seeing that his pupil often raised questions and getting no satisfactory replies from him solved them himself, said, "Swamiji, there is nothing more to teach you. I have taught you all that I know, and you have absorbed it." And so the Swami, saluting the Pandit respectfully, thanked him for the kindness he had shown him and became himself, in many respects, the teacher to the Pandit. The palace halls of the Khetri court became filled frequently with eminent persons who came to pay their respects to the Swami. Some of them were Pandits, and some others were learned both in Eastern and Western philosophy, and they regarded him as their Guru.

On a certain occasion, the Maharajah entering the room which the Swami occupied, found him turning the pages of a book rather casually, seeming to read here and there, and yet deeply absorbed. He asked, "Swamiji, how can you read so quickly?" The reply came, "Your Highness, when a boy first begins to read, he spells each letter of a word twice or thrice in his mind before he pronounces it. His attention is

Koviloor Digital Library

confined to each single letter of a word ; but as he learns more he does not look at each letter but at a word as a word, and conceives the meaning at once. And gradually as one advances more and more, and has perfect concentration on the subject one is reading, one can take in a whole sentence without difficulty. Again, if this power of grasping at once the import of a sentence be greatly developed, one may read even paragraph by paragraph at a glance, the mind absorbing instinctively the actual elements and the essence of the author's thought. It all depends upon practice, unbroken Brahmacharyam and the concentration of mind. Anyone may try, and the same experience will come to him !"

It so happened that on one occasion the Maharajah asked the Swami, "Swamiji, what is Law?" Without a moment's hesitation he exclaimed, "Law is altogether internal. It does not exist outside ; it is a phenomenon of intelligence and experience. It is the mind which classifies sense observations and moulds them into laws. The order of experience is always internal. Apart from the impression received from the sense organs and the reaction of intelligence upon these, in an orderly and consecutive manner, there is no law. The scientists say that it is all homogeneous substance and homogeneous vibration. Experience and its classification are internal phenomena. Thus Law itself is intelligent and is born in absolute intelligence." Following upon this statement the Swami spoke of the Sankhya philosophy and showed how the modern science corroborated its conclusions. He then influenced the Maharajah to take an active interest in scientific study, urging upon him the need which is India's in the way of scientific training and researches. With this purpose he ordered some science primers for the Maharajah and, later on, even some scientific instruments of a simple order, and himself began to teach his royal pupil.

No words can paint the devotion of the Maharajah to his Guru. So great was his reverence for him that, at dead of night, he would rise from his bed and serve him, rubbing his

Kovilpur Digital Library

feet gently, whilst the Swami lay asleep. On the first occasion, the Swami awoke after a time and was surprised to find the Maharajah serving him in this manner. But the Prince protested, saying, "Swamiji, I am your disciple, and you should not deprive me of this privilege." And in the daytime too, he would go to serve the monk thus, even before the eyes of his whole court, and in spite of the repeated protestations of the Swami the Prince would wait upon him in a score of ways. But Swamiji did not allow him to do so before others, saying that it would lower the dignity of the Maharajah in the eyes of his subjects.

One day the Maharajah expressed sorrow to Swamiji for not having been blessed with a son and heir, and feeling that the Swami could grant him any favour, by his benediction, said, "Swamiji, bless me that a son may be born unto me. If you will only do so, there is no doubt that my prayer will be granted." And finding him exceedingly anxious in the matter, the Swami blessed the Prince.

But let it not be thought that the Swami spent the whole of his time in the palace. He was often at the houses of the poorer class of his devotees. The whole town of Khetri was enamoured of the Swami, and he treated the least of his admirers with the same love and affection as he treated the Maharajah. He was loved by many who regarded him as the Master Himself, of whom he so often spoke to them, for they had experiences of the illumined nature of the Swami's soul, in his daily life.

One evening, in this summer time, the Maharajah and a few of his more intimate friends were seated in the beautiful gardens of the palace, enjoying the coolness of the evening air. In an adjoining hall, a group of nautch-girls were playing softly upon the Vinâ accompanied by other musical instruments. It was a perfect night, cool, and lustrous with stars. The Maharajah, feeling lonely, went into the hall and sent his Private Secretary to call his *guru*. The Swami came from his meditation and seating himself near the Prince held discourse on religious matters. Presently, the Maharajah

Koviloor Digital Library

ordered a nautch-girl to sing a song. Whilst her voice rose in song, the Swami who never was present where women sang, rose and was about to leave, when the Prince pressed him very hard to remain, saying, "Swamiji, do hear her sing! Her songs will arouse only the best sentiments in you!" Not knowing what else to do he obeyed, thinking he might just hear one song and then go away. And then, on the evening air and to the accompaniment of music, whilst all about was silence, the girl's voice ascended, bearing the burden of a song of that great Vaishnava saint, Suradas, the words of which, as translated by the Swami himself, are,—

"O Lord, look not upon my evil qualities!
Thy Name, O Lord, is Same-sightedness,
Make of us both the Same Brahman!

One piece of iron is in the Image in the Temple,
And another, the knife in the hand of the butcher,
But when they touch the philosopher's stone
Both alike turn to Gold!
So, Lord, look not upon my evil qualities! etc.

One drop of water is in the sacred Jumuna,
And another is foul in the ditch by the roadside,
But when they fall into the Ganges,
Both alike become holy.

So, Lord, look not upon my evil qualities!
Thy Name, O Lord, is Same-sightedness,
Make of us both the Same Brahman!"

These beautiful words embody in song the cry of the humble devotee's heart for the very highest realisation, and they were from the mouth of a woman who lived life as it came, but who sang putting her whole soul, as it were, into its contents. The Swami was amazed, and he thought that the woman and her song exemplified the truth that all is Brahman, that there is the Divine in all beings. He himself has said, "Hearing this song I thought, is this my Sannyâs!

CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

I am a Sannyâsin, and yet I had in me the sense of distinction between myself and this woman!" And over the face of the Swami hovered a great radiance in that night when the nautch-girl sang. He appeared like a Knower of Brahman. All distinctions of sex had fallen off, and even as his Master had seen the Divine in those whom the world calls the lowest, so also did the Swami see It. For the woman had sung with such tenderness and with such depth of feeling that the words entered into his soul like fire, and verily he perceived that "All this is One." And from that day he called this woman, "Mother!" and she, coming to know him, addressed him as her son. This instance brings to mind the story of how Sankara, the preacher of the Advaita Vedanta, was freed from all sense of distinction by Shiva Himself who appeared before him as a drunken *chandâla*, as he came from his bath in the Ganges. Accidentally the *chandâla* touched the Brâhman Philosopher and he called out, "Sirrah, how darest thou touch me!" And then the story continues in a beautiful way, the *chandâla* instructing the Brâhman Advaitin in the philosophy of Oneness, and showing how the Supreme Spirit resides in all. And, lo and behold, the *chandala* revealed himself as the Lord of Monks, and Sankara fell at His Feet. And here in the palace of the Maharajah of Khetri, the Swami had a similar experience which caused him to vanquish all sense of distinction, even that between the very highest and the very lowest, and he in an intense and luminous way perceived Oneness, taught even by the song of a nautch-girl! And by that song the Highest Truth was made manifest to the wonder-stricken monk. Luminous, indeed, are the ways of the Most High!

Koviloor Digital Library

LXX.

IN THE PROVINCE OF GUZERAT.

Feeling that he must be again on the move the Swami next repaired, via Ajmere where he again made a slight halt, to Ahmedabad, of historic memories. After wandering about several days, living on alms, he was finally received as a guest into the house of Mr. Umia Shankar, one of the sub-judges of the Ahmedabad district. During his stay there he visited the many places of historic interest which abound both in the city proper and in its environs, and recalled to mind the whole history of the place. In the olden times it was the capital of the Sultans of Guzerat, and one of the handsomest cities in Hindusthan, and as Sir Thomas Roe spoke of it, it was in his day, "a goodly city as large as London." He thought of the time when Ahmedabad was known as Karnavati. He rejoiced in the Jaina culture of the place with its beautiful temples, and also in its Mohammedan culture, and marvelled at the glory of its mosques and tombs. In this city he improved his knowledge of Jainaism and held conversations with several Jaina scholars. After having remained some few days at Ahmedabad, he journeyed on towards the end of September to Wadhwan in Kathiawar.

There the Swami visited the ancient temple of Ranik Devi. Ranik Devi was a beautiful girl, born in the Junagad territory when Sidh Rajah was reigning at Patan. She was betrothed to him, but the then ruler of Junagad, Ra Khengar, who was in love with her, abducted and married her. This brought about a deadly feud between the two chieftains. Sidh Rajah entered the territory of Junagad and slew Ra Khengar, who was betrayed by his own kinsmen. When Ranik Devi heard this, and when she came to know that the conqueror desired to marry her, she performed *sati*; and the heart-broken conqueror raised a temple in her honour. In

Koviloor Digital Library

this temple the Swami pondered over the sacredness of the marriage relationship as idealised in the Hindu Shâstras; he thought of the greatness of those Hindu women who preferred following their husbands in death, rather than live separated from them.

Having remained at Wadhwan for several days the Swami proceeded next to Limbdi. This is the chief town of the cotton-producing state of that name. In the course of his travels in this State, he begged his way from door to door, sleeping the nights wherever he could find shelter, and living as chance should lead him. Arriving in the city and making enquiries he learnt that there was a place where Sadhus lived. He went there and saw a building, somewhat isolated. The Sadhus welcomed him saying that he could stay with them as long as he wished. He had come, thinking to secure some food as he was tired and worn out and exceedingly hungry after his long marches. He had not the slightest idea of the character of the place. What was his surprise, after he had been in the house for a few days, to see that the inmates belonged to a degenerate sect of worshippers, whose religious ideas were exceedingly crude and horribly vulgar! For from the adjoining room he heard the prayers and incantations of these sex-worshippers, and also women's voices among them. He wanted to leave the place at once, lest they might injure him. But to his horror he found the doors locked and the men keeping a strict surveillance upon him, to prevent him from going out of their precincts. Evidently he had been made a prisoner. He was exceedingly nervous. Soon, however, he was made aware of the nefarious purpose of his captors, and literally trembled with fear. The high-priest of this sect accosted him, saying, "You are a Sadhu with a magnetic personality; evidently you have practised Brahmacharya for years. Now you must give us the fruit of your long austerity. We shall break your Brahmacharya in order to perform a special *sadhana*, and thereby we shall be enabled to acquire certain *siddhis*, or psychic powers." The Swami was terrified. What did this mean? He thought,

Koviloor Digital Library

"Is the man mad?" And then he remembered having heard long ago of some diabolical sects which practised the vilest immorality in the name of religion. He made every effort to keep his presence of mind. Mentally repeating his Master's Name and praying to the Mother of the Universe for help, his whole personality shook with a terrible resolve, "Not even if they kill me, will I let them break my lifelong vows!" But he thought it best to show no anxiety and to take the matter lightly in the presence of his keepers. Fortunately he was not disturbed that day. His sole thought thenceforth was how to escape from their clutches.

Now, a boy used to come frequently to the Swami there and had become his devotee at first sight. He had free access to the Swami, as the people there did not suspect him. When the boy came the next day to visit him, the Swami's face radiated with delight. He told him of his situation, and the boy asked the Swami in a whisper if he could be of any help to him. The Swami thought for a moment and then eagerly said, "Yes! Yes! my boy!" He had jumped to a sudden conclusion, and seizing a bit of charcoal lying near he picked up a piece of earthen jar and scribbled as well as he could a few words about his evil plight. Then putting it into the boy's hand he said, "Here! Hide this beneath your *chaddar* and run with it as fast as you can to the Maharajah's palace, hand it over to the Maharajah himself, and inform him of my situation." The boy did as he was told, and leaving the place without any concern manifested on his face, he hurried to the palace and gained access to the Maharajah himself. The Prince immediately sent some of his guards to the rescue; and surveillance was kept over the place.

The Swami came to the palace and told the Prince what had occurred. The latter was beside himself with rage. At his request the Swami made the palace his abode, and gladdened the heart of the Maharajah with religious discourses. Whilst remaining in Limbdi, the Swami held many discussions in Sanskrit with the Pandits of the place. His Holiness, the Sankaracharya of Govardhan Math, Puri, bears witness

Kovilpur Digital Library

to this fact, and was astonished at his learning and at his wonderful toleration whilst in argument with the orthodox Pandits. After remaining in Limbdi for some short time, he left for Junagad with many recommendations to the friends of the Prince there and elsewhere. The Maharajah entreated him to take great caution in wandering alone, and the Swami himself after his terrible experience decided to use great circum spection in choosing his lodging and to exercise discrimination with regard to persons with whom he might come into contact.

With his recommendations from the Thakur Sahib of Limbdi, the Swami visited Bhavnagar and Sihore on his way to Junagad. Arriving at Junagad he became the guest of the Dewan Sahib of that State, Babu Haridas Viharidas, who was charmed with his company. Every evening, the Dewan with all the State officials used to meet Swamiji and conversations went on till late at night, everyone hearing him with rapt attention. Mr. C. H. Pandya, the manager of the Dewan's office, who became his staunch admirer and in whose house Swamiji stayed for a time, has said :—

"The Swami's simplicity of life, his unostentatiousness, his profound knowledge of various arts and sciences, his catholicity of views and his devotion to religion, his stirring eloquence and his magnetic powers and extraordinary personality influenced all of us in Junagad. Added to these qualities he possessed a great proficiency in music and was conversant with all forms of Indian art. Aye, withal, he was even an artist of the cuisine and could prepare excellent *rasogollas*. We were devoted to him."

In the course of conversation at Junagad the Swami spoke much of Jesus Christ. He stated that he had long since come to understand the historic influence of Christ in regenerating the ethics of the Western world, and that through the Emperor Constantine and the Christian Fathers He had influenced European laws and customs and the Western intellectual outlook. Becoming fervent in his eloquence he went on to relate how all the greatness of the Mediæval Ages in Europe, the paintings of Raphael, the devotion of Saint Francis of Assisi, the erection of Gothic

Koviloor Digital Library

cathedrals, the Crusades and many of the political systems of the West, its monastic orders and its religious life, were all interwoven in one way or another with the Teachings of the Sannyâsin Christ. Indeed, the Swami's veneration for the personality of Christ was so deep that, besides the Bhagavad-Gita, he carried with him wherever he went the "Imitation of Christ," of the Baranagore days. Many of his devotees in Junagad learned to appreciate the Prophet of Nazareth through the Swami's exquisite interpretation, and they became acquainted with the precious contents of the work of Thomas à Kempis. And yet whilst he spoke with all the ardour of his soul concerning the greatness of Jesus, he did not spare those Christian Missionaries who preach the Teachings of Christ without themselves following or understanding His life of renunciation and self-sacrifice. He regretted that many of the missionaries, instead of making an effort to raise the nation through its own ideals, denounced them in most violent form without having made an unbiased study of their merits. He told his hearers of the long controversies he used to have in his college days with the Christian missionaries. He said that if Christ came to preach in India He would not have denied or denounced any religious teaching or any ethical standards, that He would have been most charitable and loving, abiding in harmony with the people, sharing their joys and their sorrows and living in their midst as one of them. And then, in a spirit of patriotism the Swami revealed to his devotees at Junagad the whole character of the great influence which Hinduism had exercised upon the Western religious imagination, and he showed how Centeral and Western Asia was the scene of the international exchange of ideas. He showed them the historic values, in this way, of their own culture and the invaluable worth of the Hindu experience in the propaganda of spiritual ideals throughout the world.

And from this he went on and on narrating the supreme excellencies of the Sanâtana Dharma, illuminating the entire perspective through which his hearers had hitherto perceived it; not alone that, he enlarged it. He also told them the

Koviloor Digital Library

life-history of the Man of Dakshineswar, illustrating it with the innumerable sayings of the Master; and thus the people of this distant province came to regard Sri Ramakrishna, even as the Vaishnavaites regard Sri Krishna, or as the Shaivas regard Shiva. He preached the New Gospel of Hinduism to them, and they all became disciples of his teaching. Here in Junagad, he also held long discussions with many orthodox Hindu Pandits.

Interested as he always was in ancient monuments and ruins, the Swami here, as in other places, found enough scope for study. Because of the Mount Girnar, a few miles from the city, Junagad is not only a place of historic interest, it is also a place of pilgrimage. For here are many temples sacred to Hinduism, Jainaism and Buddhism. There are also many beautiful mosques and tombs in Junagad. But of Hindu ruins, probably the Caves, called the Khapra Khodia, were used off and on in ancient times as a monastery for various orders of monks. The Swami saw all these, but what he was mainly interested in was the mountain known as Girnar, which is sacred to all creeds of India. On the way one passes the famous Asoka Stone, a great boulder, inscribed with fourteen edicts of that Buddhist Emperor. The whole way of pilgrimage is holy with associations of Buddhist, Jaina and Pauranic legends. One comes upon the Shrine of Bhavanath, a name of Shiva, and Sannyâsins are always here by scores. As one climbs up the mountain-sides, there are several notable temples to be seen. After the half of the ascent has been made the road becomes exceedingly narrow, and at times one turns upon the very edge of a great precipice. Indeed, at about 1,500 feet, there is a place called Bhario-Thumpa, or the Terrific Leap. Here many devotees, in the ecstasy of devotion, have thrown themselves a thousand feet or more below. Used to mountain paths, the Swami made the ascent with ease, and when he came to the large enclosure of sixteen Jaina temples, which forms a sort of fort at a height of 2,370 feet above Junagad, he paused to study its marvellous architecture and bow before the stone

Koviloor Digital Library

Images of the Jaina Tirthankaras, decked with jewels and gold ornaments. On and on he climbed, arriving at length at the summit (3,330 feet), reached by a steep flight of steps. And from that giddy height he seemed to see the whole of India as the place of pilgrimage. Or rather, he saw India, as one Huge Temple, as it were, with chapels and sanctuaries everywhere. He saw the glory of Maha-Bharata.

Descending from this particular mountain peak he went up another one, very steep, to see the Foot-prints of the Incarnation Dattatreya. In the distance was the hill and the pool of Brahmâ's Kamandalu shaped, it is said, like the numeral eight ; but he had been satisfied with the sights of Mount Girnar. His soul was yearning to perform *sadhanas*; and so, seeking out a solitary cave he practised meditation for some days and then came back to his friends, full of fresh thoughts and new experiences. Soon after he felt that he must move on. And so taking leave of his friends at Junagad, urging upon them the necessity of his roaming about, he came to Bhooj with letters of introduction to high officials there from the Dewan of Junagad.

Though it might seem strange and inconsistent, on a superficial examination, to find the Swami residing with the Princes of India, whenever such opportunity presented itself, in the course of his begging tours, the difficulty is easily cleared when one takes into consideration the fact that his intention was to influence the Maharajahs and turn their tendencies to the religious life, so that they might devote themselves to performing their *swadharma*, which was, the governing of their States for the good of the people. They were the custodians of the people. Upon them depended not only their welfare and contentment, but their advancement as well. For it is only they who can inaugurate in their territories, liberal reforms, improved methods of education, and charitable and philanthropic institutions. His whole idea was the People. For this reason he consorted with the Princes. He thought, "If I can win over to my cause those in whose power are wealth and the affairs of hundreds of

Kovilloor Digital Library

thousands, my mission will be accomplished all the sooner, for by influencing one Maharajah I can indirectly benefit millions of people." With this intention he would now and then break off from the purely *parivrâjaka* life and wander into the enclosure of some palace, there to be cordially received by the Maharajah. And yet it mattered not that he dwelt in a palace, so far as his soul was full of renunciation, and so far as his love for the People was concerned. For the condition under which he consented to live with the Princes was, that those poorer classes who desired and loved his company and who wanted to be instructed by him, could have constant access to his presence. Now he would be seen walking in the gardens of some Prince, or driving with him in his carriage, and then perhaps the next day would find him alone on the dusty roads, afoot, on his way to some poor devotee's house where he enjoyed himself far more in the simple love of the people for him. He himself, indeed, had that gracious and imperial air which all true princes have; he possessed a bearing which was nothing short of regal, so much so that when he was in the West many of the highest classes, on seeing him, took him for a prince. In the West his bearing always attracted attention, though he himself was quite unconscious of this.

Of course in many cases the Swami did not stay with the Maharajahs themselves, but with their Dewans or Prime Ministers. He knew that oftentimes the Prime Minister was more powerful than the Prince himself. And when it came to introducing reforms in Native States, for the good of the people, by the spread of education, the innovation of improved sanitary methods and the encouragement of Hindu ideas, he knew that it was the Dewan who was literally all-powerful. And so when he went to Bhooj, he stayed with the Dewan of that place. And to a disciple who visited that statesman several years ago, when he was old and long since retired, he spoke of the Swami as one possessed of a prodigious intellect, a most gracious personality, and as one who had a manner of conversation and of expressing the highest

Kovilpur Digital Library

thoughts in a simple way, which fascinated all those who were privileged to meet him. With the Dewan he held long discussions, as he had done with the Prime Minister of Junagad, upon the industrial, agricultural and economic problems of the land and the need for the spread of education among the masses. The Swami made a study of the economic conditions of each place he visited ; he studied the condition of the cultivators and of the products of the soil. His whole heart yearned to find out the practical means whereby a general improvement of the condition of the working classes might be effected. He longed to see the various Native States being governed on the lines dictated by the ancient Hindu Law-givers. He tried to make the officials deeply sensible of the responsibilities which devolved upon them as custodians and stewards of the public wealth and welfare. In all the States through which he wandered he fired the Prime Ministers with a spirited enthusiasm to revive the creative genius of the race, made them perceive the Hindu view-point of civil government and impressed upon them the need for the amelioration of the masses. This was his mission. The more he travelled the more deeply was he made aware of the wants and afflictions which oppressed the poor.

The Swami was introduced to the Rajah of Bhooj by the Dewan, and had long talks with him, which created a great impression upon the Prince. At Bhooj the Swami, as usual, paid visits to the various sacred places of pilgrimage far and near, mingling with many pilgrims and Sannyâsins, and gaining a great stock of knowledge and experience. From Bhooj he returned to Junagad, resting there for a few days. Then he was off again, this time, to Verawal and Patan Somnath, popularly known as Prabhas. Verawal is famous because of its exceeding antiquity. But of the two places Patan Somnath is the more interesting because of its great ruined temple. Legend has it that the temple was first built of gold by Somraj, then of silver by Ravana, then of wood by Krishna, and later of stone by Bhimdeva. Three times it was destroyed, and yet three times it was rebuilt. It is said

Koviloor Digital Library

that in olden times 10,000 villages were held by the temple as its endowment and that 300 musicians were attached to it. The Swami paused at this great ruin and pondered over the greatness which was India's in the past. All about him, the very dust for miles was sacred to the Hindu spiritual imagination, for, as the story goes, it was here that the Yadavas slew each other and the extensive kingdom of Krishna was brought to ruin, by His Divine Will. Even Sri Krishna Himself knowing that His time was come, sat in Yoga upon the spreading branch of an ancient tree and left His body, being shot by the arrow of an aboriginal hunter who mistook Him for an animal. Indeed, the Swami came across a man, who without doubt was a negro. He inquired of the residents of Verawal and found out that in the Gir forest, near Somnath, were several communities of aboriginals who were unmistakably African negroes, but how long they had been there has always been a speculation.

Having seen the famous temple of Somnath, he next visited the well-known Suraj Mandir, or temple to the Sun, now a curious and beautiful ruin. Both Verawal and Somnath are by the sea, and at Somnath there is a sacred bathing-place, known as the Confluence of the Three Rivers. Here the Swami found several temples with strange mythological emblems. Here also he took his bath as a sacramental act and then journeyed towards the shores of the ocean where he wondered if ever he should cross it. He thought of Europe and America, but it was only a thought, only a faint glow of desire, and then he returned to Verawal, passing the Somnath temple built by the famous Queen of Indore, Ahalya Bai, with its subterranean chapel, supported by sixteen pillars. The whole story of Ahalya Bai came to his mind and he thought of India's great women. At Prabhâs he again met the Rajah of Bhooj and had many long conversations with him. The Prince was deeply impressed with his magnetic personality and was astonished with his vast knowledge. He remarked, "Swamiji, as after reading many books the head becomes dazed, even so after hearing your

Koviloor Digital Library

discourses my brain gets dizzy. How will you utilise all this talent? You will never rest until you have done wonderful things!"

Remaining at Verawal only a short time he returned to Junagad. This seemed to have been the centre for several of his side-journeys through Kathiawar and to Cutch. Leaving Junagad a third time he now came to Porebander with a letter of introduction to the Prime Minister. Porebander is held to be the site of the ancient city of Sudamapuri, known to the readers of the Bhagavata. In this place the Swami visited the ancient temple of Sudâma and many others. Arriving at the residence of the Dewan he was cordially welcomed and was afterwards introduced to the Maharajah. This Prince took an instant liking to him and urged him to dwell in the palace. Having heard that in the Prince's court there was a retinue of Brâhman Pandits, the Swami accepted the invitation, thinking it to be a profitable opportunity for continuing his Sanskrit and philosophical studies. Here he remained for eight or nine months, deeply immersed in the pursuit of learning and preparing himself more and more, from an intellectual point of view, for that work which was to be his. He relieved himself, however, from the strain of brain work by playing and riding in the afternoons with the young Kumars, the sons of the Maharajah. While he was there a strange occurrence took place.

The Swami Trigunatita had been journeying afoot for some time, making the round of pilgrimages. He, it will be remembered, was the first of the band of brethren at Baranagore to determine to become the *parivrâjaka*. In his wanderings in Rajputana and Kathiawar he had heard of "a great Sadhu who is touring the country and who has aroused unusual interest and enthusiasm in religion among the princes and the people." He wondered who this could be; he thought, "Perhaps it is our Noren!" But of course he could do no more than speculate. He had just then come from various places in Guzerat to the city of Porebander and was

Kovilloor Digital Library

staying in the company of some wandering Sannyâsins. The monks desired to make the pilgrimage of Hinglaj next. But it was an arduous journey of many miles, and they were weary and footsore from long marches; so they thought, "Let us make this pilgrimage by taking the steamer to Karachi and then by camel ride through the desert country." But where was money to come from? They were at a loss. Then one of the group suggested, "O there is a learned Paramahamsa stopping with the Maharajah of Porebander. He speaks English fluently and is accounted a great Pandit. Moreover he has a good influence over the Prince. Let Swami Trigunatita go and interview him. Perhaps the Mahatma will intercede with the Maharajah for us so that our expenses may be paid for doing the Tirtha." But Trigunatita wavered. He was anxious to continue the journey afoot. There was no need, he thought, either of bothering the Sannyâsin or the Maharajah. But he had a secret suspicion that it *might* be the Leader himself who was at the palace. So finally curiosity got the better of him, and then, too, the monks pressed him hard. So he being the most learned of their group headed the band and was strolling towards the palace.

But it so happened that at that very evening hour the Swami was pacing on the parapeted roof of the palace, his mind absorbed in deep thought, as if searching for the solution of some important problem. Suddenly his eyes looked up from the ground where they had been unconsciously fixed while his mind was in abstraction, and he saw a group of Sadhus at a distance coming towards the palace. He started in surprise. He felt a sudden thrill passing through his whole body. He thought, "What is this! Am I mistaken! Surely there is Sarada among them! What is he doing here? What does he want? How did he find me out?" A host of other thoughts suddenly stirred his mind and he was as if suddenly transported to Baranagore and to all the anxiety and all the dear attraction of that place. "No, it is not the time yet," he said under his breath.

Kaviloor Digital Library

"I cannot have him live with me now! I have still to find out my mission and test the words of my Master! Have I not told them to leave me alone! Again the old attachment will arise, unless I tear it out of my heart immediately!" And so, in spite of himself he assumed an attitude of indifference, and going down the flight of stairs to his room on the ground-floor he received Trigunatita.

No words can describe the feelings which both had on meeting each other after a long time. Finding that the Leader resented this discovery, his *gurubhâi*, putting aside his joy at seeing him, said, "O Swamiji, I only came to ask if you can help us on our way to the Hinglaj Tirtha that we have in mind to do? We are foot-worn and weary, and my companions wish you to intercede with the Maharajah that he may give us enough money for our purpose." But the Swami answered, "Why should you beg for money? If some one gives it to you, of his own accord, well and good. Why should I intercede for you? You ought to know that I do not beg money from anyone. To-day I may be in a Maharajah's palace, to-morrow I may be in a hovel. But what does that matter? It is nothing to a real Sannyâsin. Indeed, I am thinking to take to the road myself in a few days. You are all *parivrâjakas* and should face fateas it comes to you. So, now go away, and don't show your face to me again!"

As Trigunatita was about to leave, the Swami's heart softened and he helped him and his friends; but he insistently urged upon his *gurubhâi* never to follow him again, even if he had the slightest suspicion of where he was. And Trigunatita and those other monks, bowing down before the Swami, took their leave and went whither their souls longed to go. Then the Swami, with a sigh, returned to his study-room in the palace, saying under his breath, "O, it is all Maya!" And his heart felt weary for the moment and he longed for a glimpse of his *gurubhâis* in the monastery at Baranagore; but he soon blotted out all sentiment and all shadows of attachment, and in the depth of his

Kovilpatti Digital Library

nature resolved to move on from Porebander as soon as possible.

But when he made his intention known to the Maharajah, the latter insisted that he must remain sometime longer. And so the Swami thinking perhaps that there was purpose in his stay settled down to hard intellectual labour. A learned Pandit was attached to the court, by name Sankar Pandurang. At that time he was translating the Vedas and he also begged the Swami to remain and to help him in this extremely arduous task. So both worked constantly for several months, the Swami interesting himself deeper and deeper in the study and interpretation of the Vedas, perceiving the greatness of the thought contained therein. Here, also, he finished the reading of the Mahâbhâshya, the great commentary of Patanjali on Panini's grammar. Not satisfied with having mastered the difficult elements in Sanskrit learning, he took up the study of French, and gained a fair knowledge of it with the help of the Pandit who said, "It will be of use to you, Swamiji !"

Coming to understand him more and more, and marvelling at his intellectual power and the breadth and originality of his ideas, Pandit Sankar Pandurang said, "Swamiji, I am afraid you cannot do much in this country. You see, few will appreciate you here. You ought to go to the West where people will understand you and your worth. Surely you can throw a great light upon Western culture by preaching the contents of the Sanatana Dharma !" The Swami paused ; in his heart he was glad that the learned Brâhman had spoken as he did. For it corroborated his own secret thoughts that had crossed his mind vaguely, as shadows, in this regard. Even at Junagad he had expressed to Mr. C. H. Pandya his desire to visit the West as a preacher, but this was an indefinite desire, for then, also, he saw no way whereby to make this possible.

During this time the Swami was exceedingly restless. Indeed, before he had dismissed his brother-disciple, Triguna-tita, he had called him to his side and had said, "Sarada, I am

Kovilool Digital Library

beginning to understand to some extent, now, what the Master has said of me. Really, there is so much power in me, I feel as though I could revolutionise the world ! And all the learned men at the court of the Prince of Porebander, saw this likewise, and agreeing with the Pandit told him, "Surely, Swamiji, India is no place for you. Go to the West, and when you have taken the West by storm, come back and you will find your countrymen following you and taking up your ideas!" Everywhere he travelled and at all the courts he visited the Pandits and the Princes found in him the same "terrible restlessness to do some work for his country, sometime, somewhere!" Later on when he visited Palitana, Baroda, and Mahabaleswar, those who met him found the same "restless spirit". They could not fathom the man. The Swami seemed to be one who was as though literally consumed by a raging fever.

After a time he grew uncontrollably restless at the court of Porebander and was eager to break up his student habits and wander. Anyway he thought that would give him rest and was preferable whilst he was thus pursued by this tempest of inner restlessness. And he said to the Maharajah and his friends, "I have a MISSION to perform! But I cannot clearly see at present how I shall begin, or where it is to be!" It seemed as if his brain would burst. And the uppermost idea in his mind was the spiritual redemption of India. He saw the limitations of orthodoxy and the dread blunders of reform. He saw the sophisticated knowledge and stupid activity of some who were styled "leaders of men," and everywhere he found petty jealousies, mutual animosity, and want of unity. He saw India as potentially supreme, glorious beyond words, rich with the actual contents of Hinduism and Aryan culture; but he saw that all this was being degraded by demagogues of sweeping reform and bigotted orthodoxy. He had met some who were great in wisdom and these saw with him as to the necessity for certain changes, preserving, however, what was really true and great in the Hindu traditions. On the

Koviloor Digital Library

other hand, he saw hosts of minds blinded by the glare of an extraneous culture and its ephemeral power, making effort to throw overboard the whole cargo of the race's experience, without a mature and far-sighted reflection.

Everywhere and at all times he confided to those who loved and admired him that the time had come for a new order of things. He saw that deeper than meditation and vaster even than the ascetic life was the immediate and pressing necessity to sound and protect the Dharma in its entirety. To the ruling chiefs and to their Prime Ministers he had announced this message. And they, seeing in him an intellectual genius and a man of realisation gifted with an irresistible power of personality, respected him and listened to his words. Somehow he felt that to raise India in the estimation of the civilised world he must first preach the glories of the Sanatana Dharma to the West, and so, when the Pandit of Porebander addressed him in this regard, his inner self responded with waves upon waves of great depth of feeling. The more he studied the Vedas, the more he pondered over the philosophies which the Aryan Rishis had thought out, the surer he was that India was in very truth the Mother of Religions, the cradle of civilisation, and the fountainhead of spirituality. But he was bitter in his soul that all this glory should seemingly lie buried under ignorance and that the millions were unconscious of it. He knew that the tides of the invasion of foreign culture for centuries, had incalculably swept away many of the glories of the culture of the race in the eyes of the people themselves, and that many of the Pandits, who ought to be the custodians of this culture, had become mere chatterers of Sanskrit grammar and philosophy and were only as so many phonographic records of its past, without being possessed of its spirit and of the sense of responsibility as to their adding to that culture the fruits of original, intellectual and spiritual researches.

More and more these thoughts seized the Swami's brain and he fell into a paroxysm of pain. "What can I do?" he thought. "What can I do?" And despairing for the

Koviloor Digital Library

time, he broke from his associates at Porebander and went as the wandering monk to Dwaraka, holy with innumerable memories and legends of Sri Krishna Vasudeva. But of its glories nothing remains at the present day. Now the ocean roars in tumult over the place where once the powerful Yadavas lived, and where once stood a great capital of which Sri Krishna was the reigning prince.

In this place the Swami was again the itinerant monk, living where he could, eating what he might receive as *bhikshâ*, now recollected in deep meditation, now abstracted in some vision of the past that told of the glories of the Yadavas and of their ruin, and of the greatness of Sri Krishna. And gazing out upon the ocean his soul rose up in waves of agony at the thought that of that India which was Maha-Bharata, nothing now remained except a faint outline of ruin. He sat beside the ocean's shore and yearned ardently to stem the tide of another ocean, the ocean of the invasion of foreign culture, which threatened the very existence of the Dwaraka of Hinduism Itself. And across the ocean he gazed, trying to fathom, as it were, its vast depths, and trying, also, to fathom the contents of the future years. Something seemed to stir within him in the way of a faint glimmering of hope. He hoped and prayed. Then rising from a dream, as it were, he betook himself to the monastery founded by Sri Sankarâchârya, known as the Sarada Math, where he was received by the Mohanta, and was assigned an apartment among its numerous lonely rooms. He thought of the ages long ago when this monastery was a seat of great learning, and often he was overcome with pity at its departed glory and tears flowed from his eyes. And like another Jeremiah he lamented over the evils which had befallen his country. But he was different from Jeremiah in that he struggled, in the sadness of his thought, for a solution of the national problems. He did not sit down and weep only; he thought; he passed through a tumult of intellectual struggle. And there in the silence of his cell in

Kovilpur Digital Library

the Sarada Math in the ruined city of the Yadavas he perceived a great light, as it were,—and that was the bright Future of India.

And arising from his meditations in the town of Dwaraka he next journeyed on to Mandavi. Here he made many friends. From Mandavi he went to Narayan-Sarovar on pilgrimage and thence to Ashapuri, returning eventually to Mandavi. During these travels he roamed about like a lion, begging his food as the ordinary monks, sleeping in any place where the night found him, and meditating constantly on the Most High. Before leaving Mandavi, he again visited Bhooj at the request of the Maharajah and his Dewan. He next journeyed the long distance to Palitana, where is the Holy Mountain, Satrunjaya, most sacred to all pilgrims, and especially to Jainas. Palitana is a veritable City of Temples, and in the mornings one hears now and then the sounds of bells and chants and the beating of drums. And then the rest of the days is silent save for the noise made by vast flocks of pigeons that fly from the roof of one temple to that of another. Here paroquets and squirrels, doves and ringdoves are numerous, and even wild peacocks are to be seen perched in state upon the outer walls of the temple compounds. Many of the temples here are old, dating as far back as the eleventh century. High up on the Satrunjaya mountain is a Hindu temple, dedicated to Hanuman, and a Moslem shrine dedicated to Hengar, a Mohammedan Pir or Saint. The view from the summit of this mountain is magnificent. For miles upon miles the plains extend, whilst to the east the Gulf of Cambay is visible, and to the north stretches the granite range of the Sihore and the Chamaardi peak is seen. The Swami ascended this mountain and from its summit he saw this grand perspective. For miles upon miles was the scene of forgotten nations and races, and only some few miles away was the ancient city of Vallabhipur, once the capital of all this part of India and probably more ancient than Rome itself.

Descending from the Satrunjaya, the Swami passed by

Koviloor Digital Library

hundreds of shrines belonging to this City of Temples. At Palitana, as also at Prabhas, he was well-known as a master in the art of singing and playing on musical instruments. He next proceeded to the dominions of the Gaekwar of Baroda, where he visited the capital city. Here he remained for a short time, as the guest of the Dewan Bahadur Manibhai J., the late minister of Baroda, and a man of innate piety and nobility of character, and passed next into Central India to the city of Khandwa. In the course of his wanderings in the city he came across the residence of one Babu Haridas Chatterjee, a pleader. This gentleman found the Swami standing at his door when he returned from court. At first he took him to be an ordinary Sadhu, but he was shortly surprised when, conversing with the monk, he found him to be "the most learned man" he had ever met. Naturally, he invited him to stay at his house, and he was treated by all its members as though belonging to the family. He remained here for three weeks or so, paying a flying visit up-country to Indore. Here he saw the celebrated Chattri, a monumental memorial of Ahalya Bai, that famous queen who was one of the greatest administrators India has ever known and of whom it is said, "Her charitable foundations extend all over India, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and from Somnath to the Temple of Jagannath."

Later he returned to Khandwa. The Bengali settlement and many persons of the city met the Swami and all were impressed with his knowledge of the Scriptures and his marvellous command over English literature. Says the Swami's host:—

"They marked not the least trace of affectation in his conversation. His elevated thoughts and noble sentiments flowed in an easy and natural way of expression in the choicest language. He had an earnestness about him, which made him look as one inspired."

His host asked the Swami to give a lecture to the public, but the Swami said he felt that the old system of private and personal teaching, as manifest between Guru and Shishya, was after all the best, because thereby the disciple was privi-

Kovilpoor Digital Library

leged to meet the master in an intimate, affectionate and personal relationship, even as a father and son. On being pressed by his host, however, he was half-inclined to deliver a lecture, but said that he had never before given any public lecture and had no experience of how to modulate his voice on the platform. But nevertheless. he did not mind trying if it be possible to convene a large gathering of eager listeners, for such a sympathetic gathering, he said, creates a congenial atmosphere and rouses all the latent powers of expression of a preacher, helping him to carry his audience with him. "But as the conditions proposed," writes his host, "were not practicable in a backward place like Khandwa, the idea had to be abandoned."

During his stay there, Babu Madhab Chandra Banerjee, the civil Judge, gave a dinner to the Bengali residents in honour of Swamiji. Before going to attend the party he took with him a book, which was a collection of some of the Upanishads, saying that there should be some reading of an interesting and instructive nature to pass the time usefully before and after the dinner. When the guests arrived, he read some of the very intricate and abstruse passages and explained them in such a way as a boy could understand. There was among the guests Babu Pyarilal Ganguly, a pleader, who was held to be more than an average Sanskrit Scholar of that part, who took the role of a critic. But when he went on listening to the illuminating replies and comments of Swamiji, he felt himself vanquished. When the reading was finished, Pyari Babu whispered to Haridas Babu that Swamiji's very appearance foretold greatness.

Here at Khandwa one gets the first glimpse of his serious intention to be present at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. Somewhere, it might have been at Junagad or at Porebander, he heard of the great religious convention that was to be held sometime in the following year. He said to Haridas Babu, "If someone can help me with the passage-money, all will be well, and I shall go." Before he left Khandwa his host earnestly entreated him to stay longer, to which he

Koviloor Digital Library

said, "I wish I could do so. Everyone is so kind! But I must be off on my way to Rameswaram, to perform the Tirtha, which I have in my mind to do. But if I go on in this way, halting for weeks in each town, it will never be done!" Seeing that he was determined to leave, his host gave him a letter of introduction to his brother in Bombay, and said, "He will introduce you to Mr. Chhabildas. Perhaps he will be able to help you. Really, Swamiji, you have a great future before you." "Well," answered the Swami, "I myself do not know, but my Guruji used to predict many things concerning me." Having made numerous friends and admirers in Khandwa he was off to Bombay. And his host, buying a ticket for him, insisted that he must travel thither by rail. Blessing him the Swami left with the Master's Name upon his lips.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXI

IN THE PRESIDENCY OF BOMBAY.

At this time of his life the Swami was pursued with ideas and emotions, bearing relation to his country. His mind seethed with thoughts and plans and hopes. Now he was on the pinnacle of hopeful vision and then in the dark depths of despair. It was as though ALL INDIA were pressing its life through the channels of his personality. He passed through a terrible commotion. It might have been at Porebander that this spirit took birth. He attempted to hide it in the solitude of his soul by becoming the *parivrâjaka*, but in his discussions with the Maharajahs and the Prime Ministers the flame leaped up again and again, and his soul was set on fire. To fly from it all he had journeyed to Khandwa and then on to Bombay. But here was to be less peace and far more tribulation of mind. In the Bombay Presidency he became acquainted with many Pandits and influential gentlemen, and always during conversations urged upon them the revival of the Dharma according to modern needs. With some he was disgusted; with others he was half amused, half-impatient. With very few did his soul really commune. Of some he would say, "What can they know? Their brains are full of mud!" And though some of those to whom he spoke, were dead to all power of organic thought and original methods of vision, which caused him much despair and pain, he saw that several assimilated his ideas and this gave him hope. "If I can get only five hundred men in all India who UNDERSTAND I shall shake India to its foundations!" And thus passing through the gates of hope and despair he would pray in sorrow and in solitude. He was like a lion chafing behind prison bars.

He arrived in Bombay about the last week of July 1892,

Kovilkar Digital Library

having spent almost a year in various places since one heard of him living with the Maharajah of Khetri. That year had been vast in results. His whole outlook had been orientated. As a Bhakta and a learned Jnani, he had naturally become an enthusiastic student of the culture of his country and a lover of its glories. Indeed, he had become transformed into a MAN, aching with pain because of the dangers of the Modern Transition through which he found the whole land passing. He had turned a great patriot, his heart throbbing with love and aspiration, his whole personality afire with an intellectual struggle to solve the problems with which he found India confronted. He felt that India must become self-conscious of its powers and its history in the various departments of human experience. He had grown to loathe the idle satisfaction of those educated men who were oblivious of the woes and the degradation of the Motherland! He had asked scores of them, "What is your learning without the Indian background?" His mind had become a whirlwind of ideas.

In the city of Bombay the Swami met Mr. Ramdas Chhabildas, a noted Barrister, to whom he was introduced by the brother of his host at Khandwa. This gentleman cordially received the Swami and requested him to live with him. The Swami remained at his house and used to spend most of his time in pursuing his knowledge of the Vedas to a still further degree. Quite accidentally he met the Swami Abhedananda in Bombay, who was last heard of as ill in Benares. At first he was annoyed that he should meet with his *gurubhâi* here. But Abhedananda persisted in seeing him. His description of the Swami is nothing short of startling. He speaks of him as a soul on fire. He found him tortured with emotions and seething with ideas pertaining to the restoration of the spiritual consciousness of the ancient Hindus. The Swami's restlessness frightened him. He seemed to him like a storm and a hurricane. The Swami told him at this time, "I feel such a tremendous power and energy as if I shall burst!"

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

The Swami remained in Bombay for several weeks, after which he moved on to Poona, the summer capital of the Government of Bombay. Here he met the renowned Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and he had a great satisfaction in conversing with this great Vedic scholar upon many interesting subjects, remaining for ten days as a guest in his house. Hearing that the Maharajah of Limbdi was then residing in Mahabaleswar, he next went to that place and met the Prince who was delighted to see him again. The Maharajah, who was his initiated disciple, said insistently and repeatedly, "O Swamiji, do come with me to Limbdi and remain there for good !" But the Swami waived the invitation for the present, saying, "Not now, Maharajah ! For I have a work to do ! It presses me onwards ! It will not let me rest till I have finished it ! But if ever I live the life of retirement it shall be with you !" But that intention he was never able to fulfil, for he entered *mahâsamâdhi* in the harness of work.

Swamiji next went to Belgaum, where he met the subdivisional forest-officer, Babu Haripada Mitra. He remained there for nine days. It is interesting to read here the description of the Swami, which is gentleman has published from his diary :—

"It is Tuesday, the eighteenth of October, 1892, two hours after evening. A stout young Sannyâsin, of cheerful countenance, came to see me with a pleader friend of mine, who introduced him as an educated Bengali Sannyâsin. Looking at him, I saw before me—a calm figure, with eyes flashing like lightning, clean-shaven, garbed in a *gerruâ álkhálláá* and a *gerruâ* turban on his head, and having Mahratta sandals on his feet. He was most prepossessing. I became at once attracted to him. At that time owing to my English education I believed every Sannyâsin to be a cheat, and was a sceptic in matters of religion and God. So I thought at first that this man must have come to beg for something, or perhaps because it did not suit him to live with a Mahratta that he had come to ask me to accommodate him in my house. However I entered into conversation with him, and what was my surprise to find that he was a thousandfold superior to me in every respect, and that he wanted nothing ! I requested him to live with me, but he said, I am quite happy in this gentleman's house, and if I come away seeing a Bengali here he may be pained. Besides, his whole family treat me with great love. So

Kovilpoor Digital Library

I shall see later on. However, on my asking him he promised to take breakfast with me the next morning."

The next morning Haripada Babu waiting expectantly for a long time and seeing that he did not come, went to the house of the Mahratta gentleman to escort the Swami to his place. He was surprised to find there a big meeting, as it were, with many leading Vakils, educated men, Pandits and prominent citizens surrounding the Swami and hearing him answer their questions. Saluting him he took his seat among them and was amazed at the ready replies which the Swami gave in English, in Hindi, in Bengali and in Sanskrit "without pausing." One gentleman, thinking Huxley's works embodied the highest wisdom, argued with him quoting Huxley to show the materialistic side of things, and basing his questions on that eminent thinker's works. The Swami, however, was equal to the occasion, for he himself had mastered the whole of Huxley's works. He silenced him and others by answering now with gravity, now with sarcasm, now with spiritual fervour. Mr. Mitra was beside himself with joy, and heard the Swami's words as one spell-bound.

When the visitors left, Swamiji said to Haripada Babu, "I hope you will excuse me for not keeping my promise. You see, I could not go without hurting so many people's feelings." On his again pressing Swamiji to come and live in his house, he said, "I shall go if you can make my host agree to your proposal." After much persuasion he prevailed upon his Mahratta friend to let Swamiji be his guest. The Swami's belongings at this time consisted of a *kamandalu* and a book tied in *gerruâ* cloth. He was then studying a book on French music.

Three days passed in constant talk and discussion on religious matters in Haripada Babu's house, where many educated gentlemen of the town came to hear the Swami. Even within this short time he dispelled all the terrible doubts which had obsessed the mind of his host for years.

On the fourth day of his stay with this gentleman, the

Koviloor Digital Library

Swami said that it was high time for him to be on the move again, for, "Sannyâsins," he remarked, "should not stay more than three days in a city, and one day in a village. If one stays for long in one place, attachment grows. We, Sannyâsins, should keep at a distance all such things which bind one by Mâyâ." But the host protested and entreated, and for his sake he consented to stay a few days more.

Haripada Babu, thinking that it would be of great benefit to the citizens if the Swami gave a lecture, asked him to do so, but he declined saying that, that might bring in him desire for name and fame which he hated, and that he preferred imparting instruction in a direct manner, by answering questions and holding conversations.

One day, Swamiji related to his host many incidents which had happened to him during his wandering life, when he travelled taking the vow of not touching money. Hearing them his host thought, what pain and trouble and hardship were his lot! But the Swami spoke of them as if they were mere fun. He related how in one place he was very hungry and was given a meal which was so hot with chillis that the burning sensation in the mouth and stomach did not subside even after taking a lump of tamarind! Again, how in another place he was driven away with a sharp remark that it was not a place to harbour Sadhus and thieves! He also told his host how for a time he was under the sharp watch of detectives who marked his doings and movements. But though he was harassed by them in all sorts of ways, he spoke of the matter as a huge joke, remarking, "It is all the play of the Mother!"

His host found the Swami well-read not only in religious and philosophical books, but in secular ones, as well. To his surprise he heard him, at one time in conversation, quoting at considerable length from the "Pickwick Papers." Thinking it very strange for a Sâdhu to have committed to memory such a secular book, he asked him how many times he had read it, to which he replied that he had read it only twice in his life. Still more astonished his host asked how he

Kovilpur Digital Library

could have got it by heart by reading it only twice, and that long ago. The Swami answered that whenever he read anything he concentrated his entire attention upon it. He also said, "The power of mind arises from control of the forces of the body. The idea is to conserve and transform the physical into mental and spiritual energies. The dread danger lies in spending the forces of the body in wanton and reckless pleasures, and thus losing the retentive faculties of the mind." Not long after, his host heard him one day laughing to himself so heartily that he entered his room to enquire what was the matter with him and saw nothing to satisfy his curiosity except that the Swami was reading a book which he had secured from the library of the house. For fifteen minutes Mr. Mitra stood near the Swami, but the latter was entirely oblivious of the fact, his whole mind being intensely concentrated upon reading. In the end he spoke to him, but only after Mr. Mitra had repeated his question several times, did he answer him. Then his host said to him, "Why, Swamiji, I have been standing here for full fifteen minutes and you didn't even as much as notice me!" "O, it all comes of concentration," he said. "Whatever you do, devote your whole mind, heart and soul to it. I once met a great Sannyâsin, who cleansed his brass cooking-utensils, making them shine like gold, with as much care and attention as he bestowed on his worship and meditation."

"Swamiji was," says his host, "a real teacher. Sitting before him was not like doing so before an austere schoolmaster. He was often merry in conversation, full of gaiety, fun and laughter, even while imparting the highest instruction. Again, the next moment he would solve abstruse questions with such seriousness and gravity as to astound all present. Persons of various natures came to my house to see the Swami, some on account of his great intellectuality, some to test his learning, some from personal motives, others for instruction, others because he himself was so interesting, others, again, because they desired to spend the time free from the troubles and vexations of worldly life. Everyone had free access to the Swami and was cordially treated by him. Every evening the gathering was so large as to look like a regular meeting. But it was wonderful how Swamiji could at once grasp the intentions and fathom the characters of those who came. No one could conceal anything from

Kovilloor Digital Library

his penetrating eye. He seemed to read their inmost thoughts! There was a young man who often came to him thinking of becoming a Sâdhu, so that he might escape the troubles of preparing himself for the ensuing University examination. But Swamiji on seeing the boy at once understood him and said with a smile, 'Come to me to become a Sâdhu after you have secured the M. A. degree, for it is easier to do so than to lead the life of the Sannyâsin.' It was simply wonderful how Swamiji charmed our hearts. I shall never forget the lessons which he imparted while sitting under a Sandal tree in the courtyard of my house."

At this time Haripada Babu was given to taking various medicines. Seeing this, the Swami advised him to give up this practice, saying that most diseases were purely of a nervous character and could be eradicated by vigorous and radically different states of mind. "And what is the use of thinking of disease always?" added the Swami. "Keep cheerful; live a righteous life; think elevating thoughts; be merry, but never indulge in pleasures which tax the body or which cause you to repent; then all will be well. And as regards death what does it matter if one like you and me die? That will not make the earth deviate from its axis! We should never consider ourselves so important as to think that the world cannot go on without us!" From that day Mr. Mitra overcame the habit of drugging himself.

At this same time, owing to various reasons, Mr. Mitra found himself on disagreeable terms with some of his English superior officers. Being spoken to ever so little sharply on any trifling matter irritated him and he felt unhappy, though he had a coveted position and was drawing a handsome salary. He could not help constantly studying their faults, as it were. The Swami hearing of this said to him in the way of advice, "You have yourself taken upon you this service for the sake of money and you are duly paid for it. Then why should you trouble your mind about such small things and add to your miseries by thinking continually, 'Oh, in what a bondage I am placed!' No one has kept you in bondage. You are quite at liberty to resign if you choose. Why should you stoop to constant carpings at your superiors?

Kovilpoor Digital Library

If you feel your present position helpless, do not blame them, blame yourself! Do you think they care a straw whether you resign or not? There are hundreds of others to take your place. Your business is to concern yourself solely with your duties and responsibilities." And the Swami admonished his host to change his entire attitude, and added, "Be good yourself and the whole world will appear good to you and you will see only the good in others. We see in the external world the same image which we carry in our hearts. Give up the habit of fault-finding and you will be surprised to find how gradually those against whom you had a grudge, will change their entire attitude towards you. All our mental states are reflected in the conduct of others towards us." These words of Swamiji made an indelible impression on the listener, and from that day in attempting to follow them he, to speak in his own words, turned a new page in the book of his life.

Having desired to study the Bhagavad-Gita, Haripada Babu had commenced this task by himself several times, but not being able to grasp its teachings had given it up, thinking that there was not much of practical value to learn from it. During the Swami's short stay he read and explained some portions from the Gita to him, and he says, "Then indeed I saw what a wonderful book the Gita was! I grasped the spirit and the meaning of the Gita as applied to daily life. But it was not alone the Gita that I came to appreciate under his kind instruction, but also the works of Thomas Carlyle and the novels of Jules Verne."

"I had never found in anybody such an intense patriotism as was his," writes his host. "One evening, reading in a newspaper that a man had died in Calcutta from starvation, the Swami was overcome with sorrow and repeated again and again, 'O my country! O my country!' On my asking him the cause of his grief he told me what he had read, and said, 'Do you not see how in Western countries in spite of their organised charitable institutions and charity-funds, many people die every year from this same cause—the neglect of Society. But in our country, where the Dharma has always been upheld, each beggar receives something, if only a handful of alms; and so we do not hear of people dying of starvation, except when there is a famine. This is the

Koviloor Digital Library

first time I have read that in Calcutta a man has died of starvation.' 'But, Swamiji,' I rejoined, 'is it not a waste of money to give alms to beggars? My English education leads me to believe that instead of really benefiting them it only degrades the nature of the beggars, for with the pice given to them they find the means to indulge in such bad habits as smoking *gânjâ* and so on. Instead, it is far better to contribute something towards organised charity. Then the Swami became intense and said, 'It is desirable to give something to a beggar who asks you for it, if you can spare it. Why should you worry your head as to what a beggar does with a pice or two you give him? Isn't it better for persons like you who can afford it to give him something when he asks. rather than to tempt him to steal by rudely driving him out? Suppose he does spend the trifle on gânjâ or hemp, that only affects him, but his resorting to stealing or some other worse crime affects the whole society. And in our country a man begs, and the giver gives, in the Name of God. See Narayana in a beggar and be thankful to him, for he gives you an opportunity to humanise and develop your own nature!"

The Swami expressed many of his ideas at the time to Haripada Mitra, and one finds that he anticipated by a long period, so far as the development of his human perspective was concerned, his mature outlook on life which he expressed publicly later on. Even at that time one finds in him an advocate for organic reform with regard to the Early Marriage problem. He advised all, especially young men, to make a bold stand against this custom which was enervating Hindu Society. Writes Haripada Babu on some of these conversations from his diary :—

"Speaking of Sannyâs Ashrama he remarked, that it was best for a man to practise the control of his mind during his life as a student or as a householder before taking to the life of a wandering monk. 'Otherwise', he said, 'when the first glow of enthusiasm fades out, the man would be likely to consort with those hemp-smoking, idle vagabonds who in the guise of Sâdhus parade the country.' When I mentioned to him the difficulty of controlling one's mind amidst the many responsibilities and irritations of domestic and public life, by saying, 'Swamiji, if according to your advice I give up all such passions as anger and pride and look upon all with an equal eye, then my servants and subordinates will be rude and disobedient to me and even my relatives will not let me live in peace!' To this the Swami said, 'Be like the snake of Sri Ramakrishna's parable! At first the terror of the village, the snake met with a saint who spoke to him of his evil ways. The snake became repentant and the Sadhu gave him a

Kovilpur Digital Library

certain *mantram* to meditate upon and advised him to practise non-resistance. The snake retired to a solitary nook and did as he was told. It happened that the Sannyâsin in his wanderings passed by this same village some time later. What was his surprise when he saw the snake looking half-dead, as though he had been violently beaten and maltreated. He asked him how he had come to such a pass, and he replied that by following the religious life he had become harmless and that everyone pelted him with stones and beat him mercilessly. Then the *guru* said, 'My child, I asked you not to harm anyone, but I did not forbid you to *hiss*!' So the snake did as he was bidden, and ever afterwards, though he injured none, none dared injure him.' And applying this parable the Swami told me that, though it is necessary to appear worldly before worldly people, one's heart should always be given over to the Lord and the mind kept under firm control.

There arose, one evening, disputations about some questions on the subject of realisation, among the members of a party who had gathered at my house. The Swami silenced them by saying, 'My friends, discussion ends nowhere! Religion results from direct perception! Put in a homely way, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Try to realise religion, otherwise you will gain nothing. Then quoting Lord Buddha he said, 'Argument is as a desert and as a wilderness wherein one loses his way and comes to grief. Realisation is everything.' It was not his habit to answer the same question in the same manner citing the same illustration. Whenever he had occasion to answer the same question, he did so in an altogether new and original way, making it a new subject as it were. One never felt bored at hearing him, but always wished to hear more and more."

All those who heard the Swami speak in Belgaum were struck with wonder at his scholarly acquaintance with many of the branches of physical science, including physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology and mixed mathematics. Indeed, it is said of him that even at this time he had the uncommon ability of solving all religious questions and making them explicit to others by illustrating his remarks and discourses with scientific parallels. He also showed to them that the aim of religion and the purpose of science were one and the same, the end being Truth which is always the One. And from religion he would divert to sociological questions, mentioning with pain in his voice the sad condition of the villagers who, not knowing the sanitary laws and the principles of hygiene, use the same ponds

Kavilpur Digital Library

for drinking, bathing and cleansing purposes. "What brains can you expect of such people?" the Swami would exclaim in despair. In the same strain he would point out the other vices of village-people, such as, tattling over others' affairs which do not concern them, and the idle habits of playing chess and cards. Of course he knew that the towns-people would be equally addicted to the same ways and habits if they had not had to face a greater struggle for existence in the cities.

During the discussions he had with certain people in Belgaum he often became vivid in his imagination. Sometimes he would be impatient with those who were fanatics as regards their own creeds and sects, and would not catch the drift of his thought. Sometimes they were obstreperous and then he would "blaze away" at them. He was "like a thunderbolt." He spoke truth. He spoke boldly. He did not mince words. Speaking of "those who hold their own views fanatically and ignorantly" the Swami told a story. He said: "There was once a king who hearing that the prince of a neighbouring territory was advancing upon his capital to lay siege to it, held a council calling all the people to his aid for advice as to how to defend the country from an enemy who was threatening it. The engineers advised the building of a high earthen mound with a huge trench all around the capital; the carpenters proposed the construction of a wooden wall; the shoe-makers suggested that the same wall be built of leather, for 'there is nothing like leather,' they said. But the blacksmiths shouted out that they were all wrong and that the same wall should be built of iron. And then came in the pleaders with the argument that the best way to defend the State was to tell the enemy in a legal way that they were in the wrong and out of court in attempting to confiscate other's property. And then, finally, came the priests who laughed them all to scorn, even the lawyers, saying, 'You are all talking like lunatics! First of all the gods must be propitiated with sacrifices, and then only we can be invincible.' Thus instead of

Kovilpur Digital Library

defending their kingdom they went on contending in support of their respective views and fought among themselves. Meanwhile the enemy advanced, stormed and sacked the city." "Even so are men," commented the Swami.

This story reminded his host of another bearing on the idiosyncracies of certain persons, and he told the Swami that when he was a boy he met a lunatic who always carried with him a broken water-vessel and drank wherever he found water, no matter whether it was a ditch, a stream, or a cistern. He knew English a little and seemed to be intelligent. When he spoke to him against his foolish habit the lunatic replied, "Nothing like water, Sir!" The speaker said that he offered the lunatic a new vessel, but the latter refused this on the ground that a new vessel might attract the attention of thieves. He said, "You see, Sir, because my vessel is an old and broken one, it has been so long with me, for nobody will care to steal it. Had it been a new one it would have been stolen long ago." All laughed and the Swami likewise, saying, "Well, what a funny man he was! There was some method in his madness. Such mad men are called monomaniacs. Everybody has some sort of idiosyncracy like that. We are capable of concealing it, whilst mad men cannot do so. There lies the difference. If man loses self-control by being weak through sorrow, lust, anger, malice, or non-observance of good customs, or by being tyrannised over by the strong,—then comes disaster. When a man cannot control his impulses and emotions, we say, 'Poor fellow! He has gone mad!'" Herein one sees the trend of the Swami's thought in his understanding of psychology. He seemed to have related disease and insanity to certain moral causes. So when he came to the West he was in no way surprised to find cults whose sole propaganda was the cure of disease, whether physical or psychical, through a readjustment of the mental attitude and psychotherapeutics. But he differed with these because of their emphatically physical and material methods and ideals,—the

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

gaining of worldly success, the acquisition of money, the freedom from disease without freedom from desire. He saw that their sole idea was the body, and that they were too "practical," using the word in its business definition. What he constantly held was that the whole personality should be sound throughout. But if it came to an alternative, one should be sound spiritually, caring above all for the spiritual consciousness, even though the body be twisted into deformity and one be made the poorest of the poor.

Whilst he was at Belgaum some could not understand why a man of such wonderful renunciation like Swamiji should have mixed with so many of the princes and chiefs in Rajputana, Kathiawar, Central India and the Bombay Presidency. When they came to know that these Rajahs paid him great respect and veneration and that he in his turn loved them very much, they thought, "How un-Sadhu-like!" Some foolish people even dared to criticise him for this. One day Mr. Mitra questioned him on this point, and he answered, "O, they do not understand! Don't you see, how much more profitable it is to change the mind of a prince than that of dozens of ordinary persons. True, the latter have the will to do good works for others,—but where are their means to do so? The Rajahs control the affairs of millions. They have the power to do good to them, only they have not sufficient will and that has to be aroused in them. If their minds be reconciled to truth, their hearts made pure, and free from selfishness, what wonders can they not accomplish for the public good? Themselves instructed, they will instruct the people; they will guide them; they will raise the entire community; and how much greater good will that be for the country?" Hearing this, the minds of those who had accused him of the pettiness of common men, were set at ease and they repented for having misjudged him.

Indeed, the Swami was a prince of *tyâgis* caring for naught save for such possessions as could be accounted as treasures of the mind and heart. During his wandering life

Koviloor Digital Library

he was under the vow to accept no money and keep none in his possession, even when requested to do so, what to speak of asking for it! It was only when friends and devotees insistently begged that he would accept little offerings such as sandals, a cloth, or a railway ticket that he did so, to avoid giving them pain. Indeed, the Rani of Kolhapur had pressed him to accept some rich presents from her, but notwithstanding her many entreaties he refused them. At last she sent him two pieces of *gerruâ* cloth, and these being needed he put them on, and parted with the old ones he had with him, remarking, "The lighter the burden a Sannyâsin carries the better it is for him." Haripada Mitra also insisted upon his accepting some money from him. After much persuasion he could make him take only a pair of shoes and a cane stick. He absolutely declined to receive anything else.

One day, when he and his host were alone, the Swami mentioned to him that he had an intention to sail for America to attend the Parliament of Religions that was going to be held in Chicago. And the Swami spoke so fervently concerning this that his whole soul became aglow with the fire of the Rishis, and he injected prophecy and foresight into his language. His host was delighted, and being carried away with enthusiasm, proposed then and there that he would raise a subscription in the city for this purpose; but the Swami for reasons best known to himself objected to the proposal and said, "Not yet, my son! Not yet! Now I must be off for Rameswaram. I have made a vow to visit that *tirtha*."

Hearing this, his host ran into the house to tell his wife the news of Swamiji's departure. It so happened that sometime before Swamiji came to Belgaum, she had expressed to her husband her wish to take initiation from a *guru*. She was told by him, "You should choose such an one for your *guru* whom I also could look upon with veneration, otherwise you would neither be happy nor reap any benefit thereby. If we meet any really holy man, then both you and I will take *mantram*

Kovilpor Digital Library

from him." The wife had readily approved of this idea. Now Haripada Babu asked her if she would like to be the Swami's disciple. She had herself many times thought of it, but she dared not express it to her husband, thinking that Swamiji might not condescend to be her *guru*. She said this to her husband, and added that she would consider herself blessed if Swamiji would agree to it. Haripada Babu said, "Oh, I must try anyhow. What a man he is! If we let this opportunity pass, we may never again find the like of him." Returning to Swamiji he begged him to make them his disciples, but the Swami at first protested, saying, "It is very difficult to be a *guru*. He has to take upon himself the sins of his disciple. Besides, I am a Sannyâsin; I want to free myself of all bondages and not to add new ones. Moreover, it is necessary that the disciple should meet his *guru* three times at least before initiation." By such words Swamiji tried to dissuade him. But Haripada Babu fell at his feet and wept, saying, "O Swamiji, if you do not grant our prayers, both my wife and I will be heart-broken for the rest of our lives!" Finding them deeply resolved, the Swami initiated them on the twenty-fifth of October, 1892. Thereafter the Swami consented, after much entreaty, to have a photograph taken of himself by the talented wife of the host in order to please those who desired this.

On the twenty-seventh day of October, the Swami said, "Now, my son, I must be going! I must go to Rameswaram. If I proceed in this way I shall never reach there!" Haripada Mitra entreated him by saying, "Swamiji, by your stay, joy and blessedness fill my whole house. Do remain a few days more with me." Seeing him ready to depart, the host prevailed upon him to travel by rail, and purchasing a ticket for the Swami he put him into a railway compartment. Then falling prostrate at the Swami's feet, he said, "Never before, O Blessed One, have I saluted anyone with heart-felt devotion and veneration. By saluting you, I feel myself more than blessed." And the Swami stretching out his hands blessed his newly-initiated disciple. Tears of joy filled the

Koviloor Digital Library

eyes of Haripada Mitra and a glow of divine radiance came over the face of the Swami. And as the train moved on, the Name of the Lord was on the lips of both *Guru* and disciple.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXII

THE MEDITATION AT KANYA KUMARI.

With the exception of a short visit to Mormugao in the sea-side colony of the Portuguese, the Swami came direct from Belgaum to Bangalore in the State of Mysore. For the first few days he lived an obscure life and did not come to the notice of the educated Indians of high position. But he soon became a centre of attraction and made the acquaintance of the late Sir K. Seshadri Iyer, the Dewan of Mysore. A few minutes' conversation was sufficient to impress upon that remarkable man that the young Sannyâsin before him possessed "a magnetic personality and a divine force which were destined to make a mark upon the history of his country, in time." He remained as the guest of this great statesman for some three to four weeks, during which time he met the distinguished officials and noblemen of the Court of Mysore. Wheresoever he went he was sought after not only by all classes of his co-religionists but by peoples of other faiths and creeds ; therefore it is not strange to find the late Mr. Abdul Rahman Saheb, a Mohammedan Councillor of the State, coming to the Swami to have some doubts cleared with reference to the Quoran. He was surprised to see a Hindu Sannyâsin well-acquainted with the Scriptures of Mohammedanism, but he did not know that the Swami had made the Quoran an intellectual and spiritual possession many years ago. Sir Seshadri Iyer was delighted with "this learned Sadhu." Indeed, he spoke of him as gifted beyond description and said on one occasion, "Many of us have studied much about religion. And yet what has it availed us? Here is this young man whose insight exceeds that of anyone I have ever known. It is simply wonderful. He must have been born a knower of religion, for at such a comparatively young age how could he have gained all this knowledge and

Kovilour Digital Library

insight even with his mastery of the Vedas and the Vedanta." Thinking that the Maharajah of Mysore would be interested in this "young Achârya," Sir Seshadri Iyer brought him to Mysore and introduced him to the Prince. The Swami, clad in his *gerruâ*, himself a prince in his bearing, entered the audience-room of the Maharajah, Sri Chamarajendra Woodyar. The Prince was delighted with him. "Such brilliancy of thought, such charm of personality, such wide learning and such penetrating religious insight" quite won him over. The Swami was assigned apartments in the palace itself. Often he was closeted with the Maharajah, who discoursed with him and sought his advice on many important matters.

Indeed, the Prince and the Sannyâsin became most friendly, and it so happened that one day, in the presence of his courtiers the Maharajah asked him, "Swamiji, what do you think of my courtiers?" "Well, I think, your Highness has a very good heart, but you are unfortunately surrounded by courtiers, and courtiers are courtiers everywhere, Maharajah!" came the bold answer, whilst a smile was written on the Swami's countenance. The Prince was astounded, and all the officials were alternately amused and annoyed. But they knew that Sannyâsins were very outspoken and were not respecters of persons in speaking what they felt. Several other questions were asked by the Prince, the Swami replying in the same startling fashion, not sparing even the Dewan himself. Then the Prince changed the conversation. When the *durbar* was over, he called the Swami to his private apartments, and after discussing various subjects with him said, "My dear Swami, your life will not be safe if you keep up this dreadful straightforwardness. There are chances of your being poisoned, even as other Sâdhus have been." Then the Swami burst out angrily, "What! Do you think an honest Sannyâsin will be afraid of speaking the truth, whatever it may cost him, even if it cost him his very life! Suppose, Your Highness, your son should ask me on the morrow, 'Swamiji, what do you think of my father?' Am I to attribute to you all sorts of virtues which I am quite aware

Kovilpur Digital Library

you do not possess? Shall I speak falsehood? Flattery is the business of courtiers! Truth, O Maharajah, is the business of Sannyâsins!" But referring to this Maharajah how often has he spoken with love and regard! It was his nature to take one to task for one's weaknesses in one's presence; but in one's absence he had always praise for one's virtues and would never think of one's defects.

During his stay at the Court the, Swami was introduced to a celebrated Austrian musician with whom he held a learned discussion on the subject of European music. It was a surprise to all to see how the Swami could possess such wonderful knowledge of the European as well as Indian system of music. Another day he met an electrician of national repute, who was at the time engaged in making arrangements for lighting the palace with electricity. Casually the talk turned upon the subject of electricity, and in this also the Swami proved himself to be more than a match for the man who was a specialist in that subject.

Another day a great assembly of Pandits was held in the palace hall and the Swami was invited to be present on the occasion. The Prime Minister was the chairman. The arguments commenced, the topic being the Vedanta. The Pandits discussed, severally, its various theories bearing on its many complex aspects, without coming to any agreement. Then the Swami was invited to speak. He arose and in that assembly of Pandits he gave out some of his most celebrated ideas, which he later announced in a public way in England and America, on the all-embracing nature of the Vedanta and its practical side, discarding book-worn methods in the explanation and reconciling it with other systems of philosophy. The whole assembly was startled with his originality of perception and treatment. With him, it was evident, that philosophy was not a process of ideas so much as a process of experience. In telling language, now with epigrams, now with great eloquence, he expanded upon the ideas of the Vedanta, and the Pandits with one voice acclaimed him.

Koviloor Digital Library

Pleased beyond measure with the Swami, the Prime Minister one day requested him to accept some presents from him, and ordered one of his secretaries to take him to the most expensive shop in the bazaar and purchase anything for him that he might like to have. To gratify his host, the Swami accompanied the man. Thinking that he was on an important task, requiring considerable money, the secretary took his cheque-book with him, being ready to write a cheque for as much as one thousand rupees. When he was in the shop the Swami was like a child. He looked at everything, he admired many things, and in the end he turned impatiently and said, "My friend, if the Dewan is pleased that I should buy anything I desire, let me have the very best cigar in the place." The man was struck with wonder. This was against all the premises of his ordinary stock of experience. The Swami was the first man he had seen in his life, who had ever refused a good offer and had waived the spending of from fifty to sixty pounds, which was at his command. Emerging from the store, the Swami lighted the cigar, which cost a shilling only, and drove to the palace, eminently satisfied with his purchase. But when the Dewan saw this, he at first looked puzzled ; then he laughed outright. Then an altogether different feeling took possession of him and he felt, of such stuff indeed are the true Sannyâsins made.

One day the Swami was called to the apartments of the Prince and the Prime Minister went with him. The Maharajah asked, "Swamiji, what can I do for you ?" Then the Swami, evading a direct reply, burst forth into an eloquent description of the contents of his Mission. He spoke for more than an hour dwelling on the condition of India, saying that India's possession was philosophical and spiritual, and that it stood in need of modern scientific ideas as well as a thorough, organic reform. The Prince listened spell-bound. The Swami continued, saying that he felt it was India's place to give what treasure it possessed to the peoples of the West and that he himself intended going to America to preach the

Koviloor Digital Library

Gospel of the Vedanta to the Western nations. "And what I want," he added, "is that the West shall help us in improving our material condition by providing us with the means of educating our peoples in the modern lines of agriculture, industries and other technical sciences." He grew more and more eloquent as he spoke. And the Prince promised, then and there, the necessary money to defray his travelling expenses ; but for some reason, best known to himself, perhaps because of his vow first of all to visit Rameswaram, the Swami refused the generous offer of the Maharajah at this time. From that day the Prince and the Prime Minister regarded him as "the man born for the redemption of India", and as one in whom was incarnate the Nation's Spirit.

The longer the Swami remained with the Maharajah, the greater became the latter's attachment for him. When the Swami spoke of departing, he was visibly distressed and requested him to stay a few days more. He added, "Swamiji, I must have something with me as a remembrance of your personality. So, allow me to take a phonographic record of your voice. Do speak some of your inspiring words into the phonograph, so that they may be with me always." This the Swami consented to, and even now the record remains preserved in the palace, though it has long since become indistinct. In truth, so great was the admiration of this ruler for the Swami that he proposed to make *pâdapujâ* to him, that is, to worship his feet, even as one worships those of his *guru* ; but this the Swami did not allow him to do.

Some few days later, the Swami said that it was high time for his departure; hearing this, the Prince desired to load him with rich presents. The Swami declined by saying, "Your Highness, I am a poor Sannyâsin ! What shall I do with rich presents !" But the Maharajah insisted. Then the Swami said, "Sire, I am under the vow to accept nothing in the way of possessions and to touch no money !" In spite of this the Prince still insisted, and then the Swami said, "Well, Your Highness, if you persist in offering me something, then give me a non-metallic *hookâ*. That will be of some use

Koviloor Digital Library

to me." Therewith the Maharajah presented him with a beautiful rosewood pipe, delicately carved. When the Swami took his departure from the Court of Mysore the ruler himself bowed at his feet; and the Prime Minister made every effort to thrust a roll of currency notes into his pocket, but he refused, saying, "If you desire to do anything for me, purchase my ticket to Cochin. I am on my way, as you know, to Rameswaram, but I shall halt for a few days at Cochin." Disappointed that the Swami would not allow him to do more for him, the Prime Minister purchased a second-class ticket and gave him a letter of introduction to Mr. Sankariah, the then acting Dewan of Cochin.

At Cochin he remained only a few days, soon leaving for the southernmost part of India. He passed through Kerala (Malabar) and was particularly taken with Travancore by reason of its grand and picturesque scenery. In this state he visited Trivandrum, the capital city, where he stayed with Professor Sundararama Iyer, the tutor to His Highness, the Maharajah of Travancore. The celebrated scholar, Mr. Rangachariar of Madras, who was then professor of science at the Maharajah's College, met him as well. Mr. S. K. Nair of Travancore says :—

"Both these gentlemen who were themselves erudite scholars in English and Sanskrit, found great pleasure and derived much benefit by constant conversation with the Swami. Anyone who became closely acquainted with him could not but be struck with his powerful personality and be drawn to him. He had the wonderful faculty of answering many men on many questions at one and the same time. It may be a talk on Spencer; it may be some thought of Shakespeare or Kalidas; it may be the Evolution theory of Darwin; it may be the Jewish history; it may be the growth of Aryan civilisation; or it may be the Vedas, Islamism or Christianity;—whatever the question, the Swami was ready with an appropriate answer..... Sublimity and simplicity were written boldly on his features. A clean heart, a pure and austere life, an open mind, a liberal spirit, a wide outlook and broad sympathy were the redeeming characteristics of the Swami."

During his visit here he preached in private talks the necessity of many reforms affecting the whole Indian nation,

Kovilloor Digital Library

and of the means of raising the masses. Professor Sundararama Iyer's son, speaking of the Swami, says :—

"He entered my father's house with regal air. Were it not for his Sannyâsin garb we should have thought him a prince. His ideas were nothing short of marvellous. He had the whole problem of the Indian Future before him, and he saw India organically and synthetically. He was a wonderful man. All who came into contact with him at Trivandrum, felt that a great soul had been born for India's good."

The Swami next went eastwards in the direction of Rameswaram. But before actually going there he visited Madura, where he came across the Rajah of Ramnad, Bhaskara Setupati, to whom he had a letter of introduction. This devout prince, who was one of the most enlightened of India's noblemen, became a devoted admirer of the Swami, becoming, in fact, his disciple. To him the Swami expressed many of his ideas pertaining to the education of the masses and the improvement of agricultural conditions. The Swami spoke to him in the same eloquent vein as he did to the Ruler of Mysore, on the present problems of India and its great possibilities. The Prince instinctively felt that here was the Coming Man of his Motherland, and was so much impressed with his ideas that he persistently urged Swamiji to go to the Parliament of Religions that was about to be held at Chicago, saying that that would be the most favourable opportunity of drawing the attention of the world to the spiritual light of the East, and also of laying the foundation of his future work in India. He encouraged him and promised to help him. But being eager to visit Rameswaram, the Swami soon took leave of the Rajah, assuring him that he would let him know his decision in the near future, and wended his way to that most sacred *tirtha*.

Rameswaram is the Benares of Southern India. It is the holy of holy places, immortalised in the Ramayana, having much to do with the journey of Rama to Lankâ (Ceylon) in search for His abducted queen, the famous Sitâ. Here the Monkey-god Hanuman is supposed to have crossed the ocean with one bound to the fair isle of Ceylon, and it was here that he with his army bridged over the strait between the mainland and the island. The Rajahs of Ramnad have had

Kovilloor Digital Library

the entire control of this passage from Ramnad to Rameswaram, and to this fact they owe their title of Setupati, or "Lord of the Bridge." Rama Himself is said to have founded the great temple at Rameswaram, some six hundred feet long and one hundred and fifty-seven feet broad, and He is said to have installed the Lingam or Image of Shiva. The temple is entered by a gate one hundred feet in height. The glory of the temple is its great corridors and open galleries, extending to a total of nearly four thousand feet. Often stones of forty feet in length have been used in doorways and for roofs.

The Swami was happy now that he had fulfilled at last the long-cherished vow of his *tapasyâ*. Now he was verily at Rameswaram itself. It was not the temple, not the sanctity of the place, not the physical beauty of the ocean, however, which created a stir within his soul. Nor yet was it the memories of the Ramayana, nor the poetry of Hindu culture, nor the exquisiteness of its ideals. It was that the soul of him had accomplished one of its most dearly-conceived purposes. He felt the monk's sense of moral conquest. He felt the *parivrâjaka's* victory and he was glad that he had travelled throughout the very length of Bharatavarsha from the mighty Himalayas to its southernmost points, with its innumerable sacred places. He recalled to his mind the great world of spiritual emotions and ideas he had accumulated in that period of time, since he had first started out as the itinerant monk. He had developed wonderfully. His entire outlook had been radically renovated. He had known thousands outside the province of Bengal and had made innumerable connections in many places both as a person and as a teacher. The caste consciousness had been completely obliterated and the provincial consciousness in him had been superseded by that of the ethnological and racial oneness of the land,—for though the races which compose the Indian nation be in many respects diversified, even as they are in Germany or in Austria-Hungary, yet there is a more definite and real sense of oneness in Hindusthan than in any other country in the world, for all its varied races are more at one in

Kovilpur Digital Library

their culture and spiritual outlook. The Swami had realised this, and he had come to think of India as one immense organism, pervaded by one perspective of vision and an all-inclusive purpose, which was nothing less than the preservation of its spiritual ideals and its spiritual vision. The Swami had grown from a Bengali into an Indian.

But here at Rameswaram he was not particularly concerned with these things. He was now only the monk who was gratified that his great vow had been fulfilled, and he prostrated himself before the Lord. And the thoughts of Dakshineswar and of Baranagore filled his mind, and in a mood of transcendental insight he thought of the Presence that was in Dakshineswar and in Baranagore as one with the Lord of Rameswaram. And he thought of the Mother even as of Rama, and of Rama even as of the Mother. He had come to have the Oneness of all ideals, the sameness of all Ishtams or Objects of worship. His vision was concerned with the world of supersensuous realities and his whole soul was caught up in great floods of devotion to the Lord. About him were hundreds of pilgrims praying, worshipping, following the Immemorial Dharma of the Sages, and he perceived that India was indeed Rameswaram. He thought of the glory of Sankarâchârya and the *Avatâras* and of the all-penetrating comprehensiveness of the Rishis and how they had made of natural places of beauty the places of pilgrimage, thus inculcating a love for Nature and a love for God with one and the same thought. He surveyed, so far as he could, the whole meaning and scope of the Hindu consciousness here at Rameswaram, and he perceived that all the Gods and the Goddesses of Hindusthan expressed different ideals, or super-norms, or phases of One Divinity. He saw that far beyond these simpler idealisations of experience, the whole Hindu mind had plunged into the bowels, as it were, of Being, and that these modes of deification were only expressions of its vision of spiritual entities and realities, at once normal and ideal and yet supernormal and spiritually transcendent. Studying the swarms of pilgrims about him, he thought that verily

Koviloor Digital Library

in their hearts was something which was the concrete, tangible and undeniable essence of life itself,—the perpetual quest of Man in the direction of Reality.

Completing his meditation at Rameswaram, the Swami journeyed on to Kanya Kumari, the southernmost extremity of Bharatavarsha, for he now felt that until he visited the shrine of the Goddess there his vow would not be truly completed. So he wandered afoot begging his way, living, indeed, the strenuous life of the *parivrâjaka*. After some days he reached this sacred place, his mind filled with awesome thoughts. Here at Kanya Kumari, he felt that he had performed the grand *Tirtha* which extends from this place even to those distant snow-clad regions where the Himalayas pass into Thibet. He thought of the sacredness of Bharatavarsha and of the deep, deep spiritual life, of which Badrikashrama and Kanya Kumari were great, towering landmarks. When he arrived at Cape Comorin he had with him not even one single pice to pay for a seat in the ferry-boat to the shrine. But what of that ! He plunged at once into the ocean and in spite of numerous sharks swam across to the temple, his mind eager as a child to see the Mother. And reaching the shrine he fell prostrate in ecstasy before the Image of the Goddess. And he thought many thoughts ; and he felt innumerable and indescribably intense emotions pertaining to the Motherland. His heart was raised in constant prayer to the Mother. About him the ocean tossed and stormed, but in his mind there was even a greater tempest. And there, sitting on the last stone of Bharatavarsha, he passed into a deep meditation upon the Present and the Future of his country. Hours upon hours he remained in this state. Now his meditation would be marked by deep sighs, arising from the very depths of his heart, attesting to the abyss of his thought. Now again his face would be marked with the lines of the most tense concentration, like some Great Buddha in peace. And here at the shrine of Kanya Kumari, even as in the Himalayas, he thought again and again of the glory of Bharatavarsha. Now he would feel like a strong giant, daring the universe itself; and then he would

Koviloor Digital Library

feel as a great child, the Child of the Mother. Now he would look out upon the ocean with deep, deep longing, and gaze across the straits that separated him from the mainland, as if endeavouring to fathom the life of each geographical bit of that vast continent which is India. And then his mind would become more and more withdrawn, and he would seem as if trying to see the whole of Bharatavarsha in a sublimated unity of purpose and of life. He thought of India, as "My India! My India!" and tears were visible in his eyes. His whole mind would become now sad, now joyous, with the contents of his thought. And when he arose from his meditations his eyes were like suns and his face like that of a god.

What were the contents of his meditation, it is asked? They were as deep as the Indian Ages; they were all on India Itself. They were the thoughts of a great reformer and a great organiser. They were the thoughts of a Master-builder of Nations. They were the thoughts of a Vyas and of a Manu; they were the thoughts of a Sankaracharya and of a Buddha; they were the thoughts of a Krishna and a Chaitanya;—all combined into a great world of vision, prophecy and insight. There, where all was silence, seated by himself on the last stone of India, he thought of the Purpose and the Fruition of the Indian World. He thought, not of Bengal or of Maharashthra, or of the Punjab, but of INDIA and of its very life. He passed in his thought through all the Indian centuries and he perceived, as few souls have ever done in India, the realities and potentialities of the Indian Experience. He thought of India as the nexus and heart of Aryan life, with Hinduism as the very core of its being. His whole frame shook with the fever of his thought, and he purposed unto himself that the contents of his Gospel here in India should be the promulgation of the Sanâtana Dharma and the revival of the Aryan culture as it had been known and realised, again and again, in great waves of promise and actual realisation in the Historic Past. He saw the whole of India organically and synthetically as a great Master-builder sees the whole architectural design. He saw Religion as the very blood and life and

Koviloor Digital Library

spirit of the Indian millions. He saw its future regeneration as a whole, and he said in the silence of his heart, "India shall rise through a renewal and a restoration of that Highest Spiritual Consciousness which has made of India at all times, the Cradle of the Nations and the Cradle of the Faith." He knew that others would arise, with genius in the various departmental activities, for this restoration. He was not concerned himself in this moment with details, or with any particulars, but with great and vast generalities and syntheses. And in that hour he saw the Spirit of Progress hovering over, giving an impetus in his own thought to many movements and influences which were to come. And in the heart of his heart stood the Master in a luminous Revelation.

Withal, in all his meditations he was a MONK, but a monk of a strange type, the like of which is rare to find in all the annals of Indian history. He was a monk with the historic vision and with the vision of the inseparable and complex relationship between the Dharma as expressed in the life of the citizen and the Dharma as expressed in the Ideals of the Sannyâsin life. There he sat, like another Buddha, pondering over the sufferings of humanity, especially over the deplorable condition of the Indian masses. Indeed, in that supreme hour, the Swami was even like Buddha not a metaphysician in the false and narrow definition. He was a great organiser, a great leader and an intense thinker. All the experiences of his wanderings, all his conversations with Pandits and with princes, and his living and mixing with peoples of all sorts and conditions, stood him in good stead, gaining for him a glorified recognition of India's needs.

Though he had the great vision of Indian Unity and Indian Life, though with the foremost monks of the Indian experience he saw the vastness and the incomparable superiority of the Dharma, he was, as a monk, essentially *unique* in his meditations here, for the whole soul of him brooded with infinite tenderness and infinite anguish over the lot of India's poor. What is the historic experience, he thought, or what even the Dharma without the

Koviloor Digital Library

masses ! And, through a letter written many months after, one catches the ardour and the intensity of his meditation here. His mind surveyed the whole of India and everywhere he saw that the poor and the low had been oppressed and down-trodden for hundreds of years in turn by each Power that came in the flow of fortune to rule over them. But he saw that the worst masters and the worst fate that had ever befallen the masses came from within the pale of Hinduism itself. The autocracy of the priesthood, the despotism of caste, the terrible demarcations that these created within the social body, making of the majority of the followers of the Dharma the outcastes of the earth,—these the Swami saw as the almost insurmountable barriers that had blocked the progress of the Indian nation. Deep, deep down into the very heart of things his soul penetrated. His heart throbbed with the great masses ; he seemed to have entered, in some supreme mode of feeling, that world of India's outcastes and poverty-stricken millions with whose sufferings he found himself akin, at whose degradation he found himself humiliated, with whose lot his great heart longed to share. Tears were in his eyes, and agony in his soul, thinking how those who prided themselves on being the custodians of the Dharma had been neglecting a momentous responsibility by holding down the masses for ages upon ages, and the result was terrible. They knew not that tyranny and slavery were the obverse and the reverse of the same coin ! He asked, with a start that shook his own personality to its very depths, "But what have we, several millions of Sannyâsins, been doing for the masses ? Teaching them metaphysics ! This is all madness ! Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was right when he said that religion was not for men with empty stomachs ! How can the millions rise, how can the millions be spiritual when they are starved ? We have, first of all, to improve their material condition and give them education along this line, and then they will themselves solve their own problems. To effect this, the first thing wanted is men ; the second, money."

What could he do, however, a penniless Sannyâsin ! For a

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

moment in his meditation despair seized him. And then when despair was blackest came the great light of inspiration. Something seemed to rouse him with a new spirit and he cried out, "By the grace of my Guru, I shall accomplish this task. And by the grace of my Guru, the time shall come when every city of India shall produce a score of men with hearts throbbing for the masses and with their lives sacrificed in this great cause. But where shall I find money? I have travelled the whole length and breadth of this land with this load on my shoulders and this idea in my brain. I have gone to the houses of the rich and the palaces of the princes, seeking for help, but got only lip sympathy. I shall not depend upon any one of Hindusthan. I shall now cross the ocean and go to the Western nations in the name of India's millions. There I shall earn money by the power of my brain and returning to my country devote myself to carry out my plans for their regeneration or die in the attempt !"

During his long travels over India the Swami had passed sleepless nights, thinking of the poor. Aye, here at Kanya Kumari was the culmination of days and days of thoughts of sadness with reference to the Indian masses ; here was the culmination of hours upon hours of longing that the wrongs of the masses might be righted. A spirit of prophecy descended on the Swami. His eyes looked through a mist of tears across the great waters ; his heart rose to the Master and to the Mother in a great outpouring of prayer. And it may be said that from this moment his life was CONSECRATED to the service of India, but particularly to the outcaste Narayanas, to the starving Narayanas, to the millions of oppressed Narayanas of his land. To him, in this wonderful hour, even the final, subjective vision of Brahman in the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi and the bliss thereof were subservient to the overpowering emotion to give himself utterly and entirely for the good of the Indian peoples. He asked with an eloquence of insight, startling even to himself, "What matters the Vision of the One when the many, which make up the One, labour in utter darkness and neglect!

Kovilloor Digital Library

What matters it if I have to be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries if I am privileged to worship the only God I believe in,—my God the wicked, my God, the miserable, my God, the poor of all races!" And his soul was caught up in an ecstasy of vision into the Heart of Narayana Himself,—the Supreme Lord of the Universe, Whose Love is boundless, Whose Pity knows no distinction between the lowest and the highest, the vilest and the purest, the richest and the poorest. He knew that Brahman resides in all, but that Brahman has to be awakened in the heart of the People, and then New Vedas will spring up in the land of Bharata!

So argued the Swami Vivekananda with himself in his meditation, sitting on the last stone of his Motherland, by the shrine of the Great Mother of the universe. Like another Jacob with the wrestling Angel, he wrestled with his own soul, until the Spirit gained the upper hand, going beyond the limitations of orthodox religious forms or even the orthodox religious spirit into the Great, Vast Heart of Things. To him religion was no longer an isolated province of human endeavour; it embraced the whole scheme of things, not only the Dharma, not only the Vedas, not only the Upanishads, not only the meditation of the Sages, not only the asceticism of the great monks, not only the Vision of the Most High, but the heart of the people, their lives, their hopes, their misery, their poverty, their degradation, their sorrows, their woes. And he saw that the Dharma, and even the Vedas, without the People were as so much straw in the Eyes of the Most High. That from which the Vedas have proceeded, That from which the Soul of the people has emanated, That from which the Rishis received their inspiration and the Avatâras their supreme compassion, descended upon him in all the universality and eclecticism of the mightiest insight; and he felt a Power, greater than that of his own personality, and his soul in prophecy knew that that Power was all-sweeping and invincible and that it should work from within the masses in its own ways,—inscrutably and perhaps slowly but none the less surely—making above all for the resurrection of the

Kavitha Digital Library

Motherland and the revival and progress of the People. Verily, in Kanya Kumari, the Swami was the Patriot and the Prophet in one!

Thus, the meditation of the Swami was not only thought, not only idle dreaming; it was *Living Power*. And he said unto himself, "Yes, I have found my Mission at last! I must go to the West for the spreading of the Light of the Dharma for the good of India and the World! Yes, the West,—the glorious, the practical, the rich and powerful West,—that must come to understand and accept, in a true sense, the vision, the dignity and the vastness of the contents of the Sanâtana Dharma. And then, having seen the West's understanding of the East, the East itself would come to realise an invigorated and re-born Self-Consciousness. Yes, the West, the West favoured with the blessings of the Goddesses of wealth and learning! For the sake of the Dharma, for the sake of India's Poor, for the sake of the very Life and Soil of India, I would go to the West in order that means and ways might be found for the raising of the Indian masses and for the recognition amongst the nations of the Value of the Indian Experience!"

And so out of his meditation, as its very result, he determined to go to the West. He would make *That Intensely Individualised and Aggressively Self-Conscious West Bow Down to the Oriental Experience* as embodied in India's Message to the world! Verily in that hour he was more than a monk! He was the Presiding Deity of the nation incarnate! That which the monks concentrate upon as the ideal of the race and the realisation of which affords them infinite Ecstasy and Insight, THAT in ITS ENTIRETY he would preach to the West! And in the wake of that preaching by himself and others yet to come India would rise, he knew, as a Great Light, aye, even as the Sun Itself, illuminating the whole world. Concentration and Realisation were only as parts and phases of this Supreme Vision which came to the Swami in his meditation at Kanya Kumari. He would throw away even the bliss of Nirvikalpa Samâdhi

CC-0. Digitized by eGangotri Library

for the salvation of his fellow-men in India and abroad! This was the Spirit of Sri Ramakrishna revealed to him in one of the most luminous visions he had ever known. This was the fruition of the concentrated meditation of all the Indian Ages! Verily, the like of Vivekananda has never been known in India, in this all-embracing aspect of personality. No wonder that in a righteously self-conscious mood he spoke of himself to one of his beloved Western disciples in later times as "A Condensed India." Surely That he was, and That he realised in his meditation at Kanya Kumari.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXIII

FURTHER GLIMPSES OF THE PARIVRAJAKA LIFE.

The life of a *parivrâjaka*, or an itinerant monk, is necessarily of a chequered character, and certainly in the experience of the Swami it was more specially so. Though we have succeeded in following his continuous journeying in some consecutive and chronological form, there were often gaps between the times of places visited. These gaps were filled with numerous incidents concerning most of which the Swami maintained silence, for it was not his wont, when unsolicited, to speak at length upon the experiences of these days. Some of these, however, he has mentioned, and before taking up the story of his advent in Madras, it will be well to gain a comprehensive survey of these disconnected but most interesting happenings which reveal the inner nature of the man and bring out into prominent relief some of the factors which stood as the background of the life of one who became the apostle of Vedantism—the background of Renunciation, which is India's very heart and soul. And many tales are told of him in this regard.

For example, there is the story of the Tarighat station, told by a disciple in the following words :—

"It was one of those scorching summer noons in Rajputana when the waste of sand glares like a huge burning lens ; and small whirlwinds, that pretend sleep in it but start up every now and then, are plentiful ; and even goats, hardy Rajputana goats, that are as much inured to the sand as to the sun, cannot be found picking at the dwarf thorn bushes,—that the Swami alighted from the train at Tarighat Junction. A cloak dyed in the usual Sannyâsin colour, and a third-class ticket for a station some distance up, which someone had given him, were about the only belongings he had. He did not possess even a *kamandalu*, the drinking-vessel of the Sannyâsin made of wood or cocoanut-shell. He

Koviloor Digital Library

was not allowed by the *chowkidar* to stay within the station-shed as he had no tip to give him. So he wetted his blanket and sat down on the burning sands, leaning against a post of the waiting-shed for the third-class passengers.

"Of the motley crowd assembled there, we need mention only a middle-aged man of the North India trading-caste, a *baniya*, who sat on a *durry* a little way off under the shelter of the shed almost opposite to the Swami. He had been trying to be merry at the latter's expense, with whom he had been travelling in the same compartment since the preceding evening, because the Swami had been starving. Whilst on the train this man proved to be of much annoyance. The Swami being very thirsty had tried at several stations to secure water, but the train left before he succeeded. He had no pice with him, so he could not pay the *paniwallah* or water-bearer who served those first who gave him a pice or so. The *baniya*, however, satisfied his own thirst by buying himself some nice cool water, and as he drank it he laughed at the Swami saying, 'See here, my good man, what nice water this is! You being a Sannyâsin, and having renounced money, cannot purchase it and so you have the pleasure of going without it. Why don't you earn money as I do and have a good time of it?' He did not approve of Sannyâs; no, he did not believe in giving up the world and its money-making pursuits, for an idea. In his opinion, it was only right then that the Sannyâsin should starve, and so, when they both alighted at Tarighat Station, he took considerable pains to make it clear to the Swami by means of arguments, illustrations and pleasantries that he had got just what he deserved. For the Swami was in the burning sun whilst the *baniya* seated himself beneath the shelter. 'Look here', he began again with a derisive smile curling his lips, 'what nice *puries*, *laddus* and *perhas* I am eating! You do not care to earn money, so you have to rest content with a parched throat and empty stomach and the bare ground to sit upon!' The Swami looked on calmly; not a muscle of his face moved.

"Presently there appeared another person, a local inhabitant, carrying a bundle and a *lota* in his right hand, a *durry* under his left arm and an earthen jug of water in his left hand. He hurriedly spread the *durry* in a clean spot, put on it the things he was carrying and hurried to the Swami, calling, 'Do come, Babaji, and take the food I have brought for you!' The Swami was surprised beyond words. What did this mean? Who was this new comer? The jeering *baniya's* look was changed into one of blank amazement. He was simply stupified. The new comer kept on insisting vehemently, 'Come on, Babaji, you must come and have the food!' 'I am afraid you are making a mistake, my friend,' said the Swami. 'Perhaps you are taking me

Koviloor Digital Library

for some other person. I do not remember to have ever met you.' But the other cried out, 'No, no, you are the very Babaji I have seen !' 'What do you mean ?' asked the Swami, his curiosity fully aroused, while his jocose friend stood gaping at the scene. 'Where have you seen me ?' His host replied, 'Why, I am a *halwai* (a sweetmeat-vendor). I was having my usual nap after my meal this noon. And I dreamt that Sri Ramji was pointing you out to me and telling me that He was pained to see you starving from the day previous and that I should get up instantly, prepare some *puries* and *curry* and bring them to you at the railway station with some sweetmeats, nice cold water, and a *durry* for you to sit upon. I woke up, but thinking it was only a dream I turned on my side and slept again. But Sri Ramji, in His infinite graciousness came to me again and actually pushed me to get up and do as He had said. I could not stay any longer, but quickly prepared some *puries* and *curry*, and taking some sweets which I prepared this morning, some cold water and a *durry* from my shop I ran here direct and recognised you at once from a distance. Now do come and have your meal while it is hot ! You must be very hungry !' One can imagine the Swami's feelings at this time. He followed his kind host, whilst he repeated to himself that memorable *sloka* of the Gita which reads, 'Those who, meditating upon Me as non-separate worship Me as present everywhere, to them who are thus ever centred in Yoga I secure (literally. carry) all their needs.' With all his heart the Swami thanked his simple host, while tears of love flowed from his eyes, but the kind man protested saying, 'No, no, Babaji ! Do not thank me ! It is all the will of Sri Rama !' The jeering *baniya* was quite taken aback at this incident, and begging the Swami's pardon for the ill words he had used towards him, he took the dust of his feet."

This thrilling incident, full of sweet pathos and revealing the Divine Providence as manifest in the Swami's life, is complemented by an incident of a different character which occurred in this same province. Once when he was passing through Rajputana he travelled with two Englishmen in the same carriage. They took him to be an ignorant Sâdhu and cut jokes in English between them at his expense. The Swami sat as if he did not understand one word of what they spoke. When the train stopped at a station further on he asked the station-master in English for a glass of water. When the two ill-bred fellows discovered that he knew English and had understood all they had said, they were

Koviloor Digital Library

much embarassed at their vulgar conduct and asked him why it was that he had not shown any sign of resentment. He replied, "My friends, this is not the first time that I have seen fools!" The men showed fight, but seeing the Swami's strongly-built frame and undaunted spirit they thought better of it and apologised to him.

An amusing incident is told of the Swami to the effect that, during one of his long railway travels his fellow-passenger was a learned Theosophist who besieged him with all sorts of queries, asking whether he had been in the Himalayas, and whether he had met there any *Mahâtmâs*, describing them as immortals having huge bodies, long matted-hair, and as possessed of all sorts of incredible powers. The Swami thinking to teach him a lesson, encouraged him to talk on by readily confirming all his effusions, as if from direct evidence. Then Swamiji smiling within himself gave a more glowing description of the miraculous performances of the *Mahâtmâs* until his listener gaped in amazement, and asked if they had told him anything about the duration of the present cycle. Swamiji said that he had a long talk on that subject with the *Mahâtmâs*, who spoke to him on the coming end of the cycle and what part they would play in the regeneration of mankind to bring about the *Satya-yuga* once more, and so on and so forth. The credulous man hung upon every word that fell from the Swami's lips as gospel truth! Being immensely gratified with the possession of so much new information the man invited the Swami to partake of some food, which he readily consented to do, for he had not taken anything for a whole day though he was travelling second class. His admirers out of respect had put him in the second-class compartment and gave him a ticket for the same, but as he was then living up to the ideal of taking no thought for the morrow they could not persuade him to take either money or food with him.

When their meal was over, the Swami regarded the man with much interest, seeing that he had a great heart but was entangled in this pseudo-mysticism because of his credulous

Koviloor Digital Library

nature. He then gave to the gentleman a bit of his mind and began to fire at him saying, "You educated fools, you who boast so much of your learning and enlightenment, how could you unhesitatingly swallow all those wild, fantastic tales!" The gentleman hung down his head at this reproof and uttered not a word.

Taking pity on him, however, and thinking that the man could be diverted from his distorted notions of what constituted spirituality, the Swami said to him with great vehemence of feeling, "My man, you seem rather intelligent. It befits a person of your type to exercise your own discrimination. Spirituality has nothing to do with the display of psychical powers which, when analysed, show that the man who performs them is the slave of desire and the most egotistical of egotists. Spirituality involves the acquisition of that true power, which is character. It is the vanquishing of passion and the rooting out of desire. All this chasing after psychical illusions, which means nothing in the solution of the great problems of our life, is a terrible wasting of energy, the most intense form of selfishness, and leads to degeneracy of mind and physical conditions It is this nonsense which is demoralising our nation. Turn your attention to the realities of life about you. What we need now is practical common sense, a public spirit and a philosophy and religion which will make us MEN, which will make us stand on our own feet. We want a religion which will give us faith in ourselves, a national self-respect, and the power to feed and educate the poor and relieve the misery around us. What will you do with a *Mahâtmâ* residing somewhere in the Himalayas and appearing before you from the sky, when the people around you are dying of starvation and the millions are degenerating for want of education? Nonsense! If you want to find God serve man! If you want to acquire power, serve your brother-men." The gentleman on hearing this was overcome by emotion, and understood the righteousness of the Swami's attitude. He assured him that he would thenceforth follow his valuable precepts.

Koviloor Digital Library

Indeed, the Swami had little patience with men who debauched their manhood in mystery-mongering, effeminating themselves and wasting their energy, which should have been employed in the development of the highest powers of the soul.

Speaking to Girish Babu of the experiences of his *parivrâjaka* days the Swami told of an event, of a more pleasant character, which took place in the State of the Maharajah of Khetri. To use the Swami's own words :—

"In the course of my wanderings I was in a certain place where people came to me in crowds and asked for instruction. Though it seems almost unbelievable, people came and made me talk for three days and nights without giving me a moment's rest. They did not even ask me whether I had taken any food. On the third night when all these visitors had left, a low-caste poor man came up to me and said, 'Swamiji, I am much pained to see that you have not taken any food these three days. You must be very tired and hungry. Indeed, I have noticed that you have not even taken a glass of water.' I thought that Nârâyana Himself had come in the form of this low-caste man to test me. I asked him, 'Can you give me something to eat?' The man said, 'Swamiji, my heart is yearning to give you food, but how can I give you *chapatis* baked by my hands! If you allow me I shall be most glad to bring flour, lentils, and other things, and you may cook them yourself.' At that time, according to the monastic rules, I did not touch fire. So I told him, 'You had better give me the *chapatis* cooked by you. I will gladly take them.' Hearing this, the man shrank in fear; he was a subject of the Rajah of Khetri and was afraid that if the latter came to hear that he, a cobbler, had given *chapatis* to a Sannyâsin he would be severely dealt with and possibly banished from the State. I told him, however, that he need not fear and that the Rajah would not punish him. He could not believe me. But out of the kindness of his heart, even though he feared the consequences, he brought me the food having cooked it himself. I doubted at that time whether it would have been more palatable if Indra, the King of the Devas, should have held a cup of nectar in a golden basin before me. I shed tears of love and gratitude and thought, 'Thousands of such large-hearted men live in lowly huts, and we despise them as low castes and untouchables!' When I became well acquainted with the Rajah I told him of the noble act of this man. Accordingly, within a few days the latter was called to the presence of the Prince. Frightened beyond words, the man came shaking all over, thinking that some dire punishment was to be inflicted upon him. But the Rajah praised him and put him beyond all want."

Koviloor Digital Library

Once it occurred to the Swami, in the course of his itinerancy, that going from place to place and begging for food from door to door was after all not the aim of his life for the realisation of which he had renounced his home. He thought, "Let me beg no longer! What benefit is it to the poor to feed me? If they can save a handful of rice, they can feed their own children with it. Anyway, what is the use of sustaining this body if I cannot realise God?" A desperate ascetic mood came upon him, and a terrible spiritual dissatisfaction overwhelmed him, as sometimes occurs with great mystics, and he determined in a moment of supreme despair to plunge into a dense forest, and like some great Rishis of old, to let the body drop from sheer starvation and exhaustion. Thereupon he entered into a thick forest which stretched for miles and miles before him, and walked the whole day without a morsel of food. The evening approached. He was faint from over-fatigue and sank to the ground beneath a tree, fixing his mind upon the Lord, his eyes looking vacantly in the distance.

After he had spent some time in this way, he saw a tiger approaching; nearer and nearer it came. Then it sat down at some distance from him. The Swami thought, "Ah! This is right, both of us are hungry. After all, this body has not become the vehicle for absolute realisation, and as by it no good to the world will possibly be done —it is well and desirable that it should be of service at least to this hungry beast." He was lying there all the while calm and motionless, waiting every moment for the tiger to pounce upon him and eat him up. But for some reason or other, the animal started up and ran off in another direction. The Swami, however, thought that it might yet return and make a meal of him. He waited and waited, but the tiger did not come. He spent the night in the jungle beneath the shelter of the tree, holding communion with his own soul. And with the approach of dawn in the silence of that forest, pondering over the guiding Providence of the Most High a great sense

Koviloor Digital Library

of power came upon him. The full contents of this experience were known only to himself.

Once, in the course of his weary marches on foot, he became dizzy from exhaustion and could walk no farther. The sun was intolerably hot. Summoning his strength he reached a tree near by and beneath its spreading branches sat down. A sense of unutterable fatigue came over his limbs. His brain was reeling. Everything whirled before his eyes, and he thought that he would faint. Then, as a great light shines suddenly upon the darkness, the thought came to him, "Is it not true that within the soul resides all power? How can I be dominated by the body and the senses? How can I be weak?" Therewith a sudden energy flowed through his body. His mind became luminous. His senses recovered themselves, and he arose and journeyed on, determined that he would never yield to weakness. Many times he was in such a state in his *parivrâjaka* life; but he asserted his higher nature again and again and life came to him. Says the Swami in one of his lectures in California:—

"Many times I have been in the jaws of death, starving, footsore, and weary; for days and days I had had no food, and could walk no farther; I would sink down under a tree, and life would seem to be ebbing away. I could not speak; I could scarcely think; but at last the mind reverted to the idea: 'I have no fear nor death; never was I born nor died; I never hunger nor thirst. I am It! I am It! The whole of nature cannot crush me; nature is my servant, after all. Assert thy strength, thou Lord of Lords and God of gods! Regain thy lost empire! Arise and proceed and stop not!' And I would rise up, reinvigorated, and here am I, living, to-day. Thus, whenever the darkness comes, assert the reality and everything adverse must vanish. For, after all, it is but a dream. Mountain high though the difficulties appear, terrible and gloomy though all things seem, they are but Mâyâ. Fear not, and it is banished. Knock it down, and it vanishes. Stamp upon it and it dies."

At another time, whilst travelling afoot in Cutch, he was passing through a desert. The scorching rays of the sun poured down upon him. His throat was parched and nowhere near did his eyes find a human abode. On and on he went until he saw a village with inviting pools of water. He saw the houses and he felt happy to think that he would find food,

Koviloor Digital Library

drink and shelter there. He hastened his steps, each moment believing that it was only a few furlongs farther. But he walked on and on and still the village seemed as far off as before! Finally, in despair he sat down upon the sands and looked up. Where was the village! Where had it gone! And then he knew—it was only a mirage! And then he thought, "O, such is life! Such is the deceit of Mâyâ. O for the vision of Reality, O for the seeing of God!" After a long meditation he arose and journeyed on, and though he saw the mirage all the time, he was never deceived by it, for he knew what it was. When in the West he gave a series of lectures upon Mâyâ, he compared Mâyâ to a mirage, speaking of this experience. And one sees in this incident in the desert and the solitude the cause of that later eloquence and intellectual and spiritual insight into the nature of the dreaded Mâyâ.

Once he said in the presence of a disciple, as if he were speaking to himself, "O the days of suffering I passed through! Once having nothing to eat for three days I fell down senseless on the road. I did not know how long I was in that state. When I regained my consciousness, I found my clothing wet through by a shower of rain. Drenched in it, I felt somewhat refreshed. I arose and after trudging along some distance I reached a monastery and my life was saved by the food that I received there."

Many, many were the times when the Swami faced danger, hardship and want in the solitude as the *parivrâjaka*. Oftentimes there was nothing in his possession save, perhaps, a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna and a Gita. In Central India, probably when he left Khandwa for some distance to the north, he had many trying experiences meeting with peoples of various natures who refused to give him food and shelter, and often having only the barest food after several days' fasting. It was in that period when he lived with a family of the sweeper caste and saw the priceless worth and potentialities that often lie within these lowest of the low. It might have been this experience and others similar to it which made him, by genuine human contact, realise the distressing condi-

Kovilloor Digital Library

tion of his land. Poverty, wretchedness and utmost misery he saw on every side and his heart was overwhelmed with feeling. It was, indeed, from such experiences as these that he arose as the patriot and the lover of the sinking millions.

The longer he travelled and the more he studied the conditions, the more definitely was he made aware of the needs of his Motherland ; he saw its greatness ; but he also saw its weaknesses, the central evil of which, he perceived, was that the nation was losing its individuality. The only redeeming power, to his mind, was a restatement of the culture of the Rishis. He said, "It is not religion that has brought about this calamity ; it is the fact that religion is not truly followed. Religion when dynamic is the most potent of all powers." In Poona, whilst studying the glorious ruins of the Peshawas, he felt that it was not religion which had weakened the nation ; for in the name of Religion he well knew that Mohammed had been the founder of empires.

Withal he was the monk. One sees him in his wanderings and in the heart of his heart a true monk. And the experiences of his *parivrâjaka* days confirmed him as to the necessity of an intensification of monastic ideals in the land. True monasticism, he discovered in his studies of the Scriptures, is the mother of the true civic spirit ; and he made comparisons in his mind, reflecting how the great abbots of the West often ruled the politics of nations and preserved the culture of the West ; he knew also that the greatness of the Indian centuries was everywhere impressed by the larger greatness of the Seers, such as Visvamitra, Vashishtha, Sri Krishna, Buddha, Ramdas, and others. More and more as he developed in these days did he come to know the fundamental requirements of the Modern Transition to be spiritual. So, with regard to himself, he concentrated all the energies of his personality upon the monastic ideals. He was a monk of monks ; and all the monks who met him were impressed with him, yea, more, they loved him. And his love for them was great. How often did he not serve them, regarding them as bearers of India's highest ideal—Renun-

Koviloor Digital Library

ciation! The story is told of him how, when in the Himalayas, he chanced to meet an old Sannyâsin suffering from extreme cold. He was one of those monks who wander about like lions, scorning any protection overhead. But he was ill and miserably cold. The Swami was passing by and saw his plight. At once he took off the only blanket that he had as his covering and put it over the monk. The latter looked up, and a knowing smile of gratitude played over his countenance as he uttered the words, "Narayana bless you!"

Sometimes the monks would confide in him their past life and feel repentant. For example, when he was at Hrishikesh he met a Sannyâsin of luminous countenance and, as he came to know by and by, of luminous realisation as well. The Swami addressed him calling upon the Name of the Lord. A conversation ensued, and in the course of it the man's eyes became dimmed with tears, his voice choked with emotion—and he told his story. As the thread of his life's history was spun out in the telling, the Swami's eyes were full of amazement. He hung on every word that fell from his lips. "Yes,—I know Pavhari Baba," he said in hurried response to the question. "I suppose," continued the monk, "you have heard of the story of the thief who visited his *âshrama* to rob him of his few belongings, how he ran after the fleeing robber who had dropped the stolen goods in fear, and how he picked them up and catching up with the fugitive implored him to take them as rightfully belonging to him, saying, 'All these are yours, Narayana!" "O yes," said the Swami, "I remember the story well. Wonderful, indeed, is Pavhari Baba!" "Well," said the monk, overcome with feeling, "I was that thief." The Swami was speechless with surprise. "I saw my wickedness," went on the monk "and repenting of my ways, I adopted this life in order to gain that most priceless of all possessions, the Lord Himself!" The Swami's first impulse was to fall at the feet of this saint, for saint he had become. For hours the conversation continued, the monk pouring forth all the knowledge he had acquired of the spiritual life since his becoming a Sâdhu. It was already late at night and the stars were

Kovilpur Digital Library

overhead when the two parted, a great peace filling their hearts. The Swami pondered for days over the incident. That event at Hrishikesh spelt for him a great illumination. And when later in America, he spoke of "sinners as potential saints," he must have had in his mind this thief who had gained realisation.

Many and strange are the experiences of *parivrâjakas*. It was somewhere in upper India that he became for a time the guest of a police inspector of a certain *tirtha*. This gentleman used to read Scriptures every day and was of a devout nature. He took a fancy for the Swami. He was drawing then a salary of a hundred and twenty-five rupees a month, but Swamiji found that his way of living must have cost him no less than double his pay. When he became intimately acquainted with his host he asked him how he could manage all that expenditure. The host smiled and said in a confidential tone, "Swamiji, it is you, Sâdhus, who really help me!" "What do you mean?" asked the Swami. The host confided in him saying, "You see, many Sâdhus come to visit this place of pilgrimage, and most of them are not so good as you. On suspicion, I make a search of what they may have with them. Sometimes a good deal of money is found on their persons, hidden in all sorts of strange ways. I put pressure only on those whom I suspect to be in possession of it by unlawful means, and they are thankful to me to let them go, leaving behind them all their money." "But, Swamiji," added this custodian of the Law with some pride, "I swear to you, I do not take bribes in any other way!"

At one time, during his wanderings in the Himalayas, he lived with a family of Thibetans. Polyandry being the prevailing custom among these people, this family consisted of six brothers with but one woman as their common wife. When the Swami became quite familiar with them, he argued with his hosts concerning polyandry, becoming quite fervent in his denunciation. Hearing his words the men were much vexed with him and asked him, "How you being a Sâdhu

Koviloor Digital Library

could bring yourself to teach others to be selfish! 'This is a thing which only I should possess and enjoy to the exclusion of any other!'—is not such an idea wrong? Why should we be so selfish as to have each a wife for himself? Brothers should share everything between themselves, even their wives." Though the answer might have had its logical weaknesses to the Swami, yet he was greatly astonished to hear such a reply from these simple-minded mountaineers whose sincerity was unimpeachable. And the Swami thought that, after all, one may argue for or against almost anything. It was this and similar incidents which caused him to think deeply over the customs and manners of various peoples, as he met them in his travels through many provinces from the Himalayas to the southernmost part of India. It certainly broadened his perspective, and made him see life at all angles of observation and analysis. It made him weigh well in the balance the arguments for as well as against any new experience or circumstance or custom which chanced to cross his path. And he endeavoured to see the standards of social life and of ethics of all nations and races, through their eyes.

Every one will admit that the life of a wandering monk who has the powers of observation and discrimination, is necessarily a great educational opportunity. The monks are, as a rule, a walking geography and history of their country, bringing culture and education in primitive, perhaps, but nevertheless direct ways, to the doors of the great masses, who never travel and who are bred and brought up in ignorance. The Swami made use of this opportunity to its very best in his peregrinations. It was like a university to him, only a thousand times more fascinating and more real. But in his heart he always kept aflame the live fires of the Sannyâsin spirit, and there were many occasions when he would rise to the greatest moods which had ever visited his personality. Various states of consciousness would pour in upon him and he would feel transported into the great freedom which is the one ideal of the itinerant monk. He would find at one time the whole world fall off from him.

Koviloor Digital Library

He would at another time stand apart from his own states of mind and look at everything as the witness. There were times when he was purely monastic, when he longed only for the cave in which to meditate, and to break all bonds and soar into the Pure Consciousness of Brahman. As he journeyed along afoot, staff and *kamandalu* in hand, he would feel himself as some being apart from all worldly affairs and concerned only with realities even beyond the contents of his personality itself. In these spiritual hours he was the monk only, busying himself with reminiscences of the Master, with meditations on the nature of God and soul and yearning for that condition of absolute beatitude which comes to him who merges his own nature in that of the Supreme. When he came in contact with people he had always a message for them ; when he was by himself he was the simple Sannyâsin, caring for nothing, unconcerned in the highest sense with regard to all things save his Sâdhanâ. He loved to roam towards twilight and in the early morning hours when the whole world was comparatively still, and when the silence of the jungle or the uncultivated plains spoke volumes to the meditative mind. Often he would sit alone by some river bank or where a grove of trees afforded shade, and far away from all worldly life he would sound the depths of his own soul. There in the quiet, he pondered over the teachings, the character and the depth of the realisations of the Man of Dakshineswar, and he wondered if it ever would come to pass when, freed from all sense of a mission or a message, he could sink into absolute forgottenness of self.

But he was born to do things, and even in the midst of these silent hours he would experience again and again great down-pourings of spiritual energy flowing into the mighty desire to serve. He often felt that the realisation which he had achieved, could not be kept within the bounds of his own personality. His destiny was to give—to give—to give. For so had the Master spoken of him. And then again, he would feel the responsibility that he, wearing the garb of a Sâdhu, which was the garb of a teacher, owed to the Indian peoples.

Koviloor Digital Library

When by himself, he would perchance take the picture of Sri Ramakrishna from the bit of *gerrua* in which he had it wrapped and gaze upon it with reverent intensity, as though he would make the lips of the Master's likeness speak to him directly as to what was intended from On High. From Almora to Kanya Kumâri this was the state of his soul. But there was no mistake with regard to that which was in the womb of Time concerning his future destiny. All along, sometimes more intensely than at others, he would feel the impetus to teach and preach in a public manner; and he thought, even as he had in Baranagore, that if the upper classes would not hear him he would go to villages where only *chandalas* lived and preach to them, in a concrete and practical way, the contents of his personal realisation.

Yet something told him, as it were, that his preaching would be of a world-wide character commanding universal recognition. Often when he conversed with Pandits and with educated men, he would feel cold waves of despair steal over him even in the tensest moments of his enthusiastic outbursts. Gradually he came to have deeper and deeper consciousness within him that no matter how eloquently he taught, the dreams of his life would not be realised and creative impulses would not be awakened until he and the Sanatana Dharma through him had received the overwhelming sanction of the whole wide world. Therefore, when he arose from his meditations at Kanya Kumari and wended his way to Madras, what formerly possessed him only in some uncertain though insistent manner he perceived to be more and more of an essential and unavoidable necessity. Many reasons and intuitions had been pressing in upon him. The thought of preaching the Vedanta to the West had been a constant development with him. And it was in Kanya Kumari that he saw in a comprehensive way the imperative rationale of his purpose of leaving India. He decided that he would search out the Western world, analyse the worth of its contents and fathom its whole spirit. He would master its message and make a contrast between its values

Koviloor Digital Library

and those of the Sanatana Dharma. And he would welcome whatever came to him in the way of revelation, and apply it to the modern needs and requirements of the Indian nation. Often he reflected over the means and ways of redeeming the social consciousness and self-respect of the Indian masses who were oppressed by poverty, ignorance and industrial disadvantages. He felt that the West could help the East in solving these problems for itself. For the good of India, for the preaching of the Sanatana Dharma, for disseminating the treasures of the Aryan culture to the world at large, he would go to the West. Everything pointed to this. But he was not as yet aware that he was to become a great Teacher to the peoples of the West, and that he was to be accepted by many in the West as a Guru and a Prophet. The only thought which now obsessed him was INDIA—INDIA !

Before closing the chapters on his *parivrâjaka* days in India—for he was also a true *parivrâjaka* in lands across the seas—it would be relevant to conceive clearly and in some synthetic way the changes of personality and temperament the Swami had undergone since first commencing his long wanderings, and also to see panoramically, as it were, the comprehensiveness of his vast experiences. When he first left the monastery at Baranagore he was more of a fiery enthusiast, a wonderful idealist, a great mystic in his vision, but he had not seen the outside world, nor had he travelled. Necessarily, the life of the wanderer was a great developing experience, opening up many opportunities for original thought and observation. He saw the "ins" and "outs" of customs and became to all intents and purposes a practical sociologist, a practical religious mystic, who made of the life of the people with whom he came into contact a constant and analytical study, relating the human to the religious vision wheresoever he went. From an academic student of Indian history and Indian ideas he had become in his wanderings, a faithful and first-hand observer, gaining daily an incalculably better perspective of the Indian world. The enthusiast in him had become transfigured into the careful thinker. The

Kovilpoor Digital Library

idealist in him had become the realist, seeking to renovate the contents of the Indian experience wheresoever he found them marred by failings and imperfections. Though the years of his discipleship at Dakshineswar had afforded him a rare opportunity to mix with great minds and gather synthetic ideas, the long period of his *parivrâjaka* days made it possible for him to find out their solution and the means of putting those ideas into practice for the well-being of his brother-men. Whilst as Norendra he perceived the cogency and coherency of those ideas that he gained, he had not the personal experience of their wide practical relations and applications. But on the highways of Sannyâsin life he had every opportunity of putting his conclusions with regard to Hinduism and Indian idealism to the test.

So his *parivrâjaka* experiences, whilst of a deep spiritual character, were also scholarly, for he always scrutinised and reflected. As one of his brother-monks has said of him, "He was constantly on the look-out for new experiences at this time. He was constantly gathering ideas, making contrasts and comparisons, saturating his mind with the religious and social ideas of every province, studying various systems of theology and philosophy, and finding out the inherent worth of all the varied Indian peoples whose life he closely observed." Not only that, however, for the deepest element in all this scholarly observation was an unintermittent and profound search for Unity in the world of Indian ideals. Though he was often much perplexed to find such a great variance in social customs and local manners and traditions, he perceived that underlying all the apparent complexity of Indian vision was the Oneness of the spiritual Vision. He saw that the genius of the Indian peoples from Almora to Kanya Kumari was throughout spiritual. Thus, after prolonged meditation over the diversified problems of the Modern Transition, he finally came to the conclusion that should India ever regain its self-consciousness, the means and the methods must be spiritual. For one finds in his earliest letters from the West to the group of his disciples in Madras, that he emphasises

Kovilpor Digital Library

the spiritual as the all-comprising means of the re-awakening of the Indian peoples. He knew already that the spiritual impetus, once given, would diversify itself into many channels of national usefulness and activity, and would unify the Indians into a nation. This he knew would cement the lives of the millions into one common purpose,—the regeneration of the Motherland. In the end he felt that even now the great distinctions of caste and custom which had grown into the body of the Indian thought, on account of many extraneous and self-adjusting circumstances in the past, were only on the surface. Deep underneath were the currents of unity, and when the spiritual shock should have been transmitted, the whole ocean of Indian society would be lashed into a storm of energetic and unified purpose, and thus the most advanced and progressive ideals would be realised in a comparatively short time and in the most natural way with the least resistance. By the term spirituality, the Swami did not mean the so-called passive and resigned mysticism or any form of religious quietism which lays emphasis on some special theological ideas and doctrines. He meant the life-principle of the race, its genius, its dynamic and aggressive potentialities, its struggles to give utterance to its universal ideals, its power to develop the active and energising factors in the transmutation of fossilised traditions and customs into re-empowered and re-vivified conditions for racial enlightenment and unity. He meant its inherent vigour to give birth to new historic epochs, to adjust itself to the needs of the new time and changing environment, for he had learned that if the heart of a nation is touched, it responds electrically and in manifold ways.

During the whole period of his travels, he had struggled to sound the alleged difference between the Mohammedan and Hindu world, and he found that it was likewise only apparent, and that its emphasised condition was only to be met amongst the illiterate, the malicious, and the fanatically prejudiced. For in his own personal experience he had seen that the Mohammedans as a race were as generous and

Kovilpoor Digital Library

as human and as Indian at heart as the Hindus, and also that the enlightened ones amongst them understood and appreciated the culture of Hinduism as well, realising the intimate relationship between the philosophy of Sufism and the Advaita Vedanta and other social and religious elements. Therefore, in his own mind, the distinctions between Mohammedan and Hindu, which the Swami as a young man had thought to be insuperable barriers to a unified Indian consciousness, were entirely modified and in many respects obliterated. He thought of all as Indians, and often he seemed to foresee, as a renewed possibility, that which had been already a fact in the history of the Indian Past, namely that Mohammedan and Hindu, seeing the necessity of confederation and national organisation, would put aside their religious sectarianism and join hands as in the days of Akbar and Shah Jehan.

In every way the Swami had by the time he reached Madras and after, so broadened his outlook that he saw the perfection and ingrained power and aspiration of all sects and religions. And as the days passed he saw that the meeting-place where all sects, castes and peoples of Hindusthan could unite, would be in the spirit of an organised brotherhood, of an organised public life and in that of an organised feeling of responsibility on the part of all educated Indians to the masses. He felt that different religious ideals should be a matter of personal realisation, never being permitted to affect the affairs of state. And somehow he also felt that the various modern religious organisations tinged with Western theology or Western culture, were also, though perhaps unconsciously, helping in the work of the crystallisation of the Modern Transition. He felt that with the recognition of the deeper elements of truth all sectarian bittreness would die out and all would join hands in the common task of restating and remodelling, according to modern needs, the contents of the ancient Indian culture.

With this supreme outlook the Swami arrived in Madras

Koviloor Digital Library

as the very embodiment of the Indian Consciousness, as a Man and as an Indian. No wonder then that he influenced the minds of some of the most enlightened citizens of Madras. But though the Swami was such a great synthetic observer of the Indian world, having plunged the ploughshare of his thought into the very bowels of Indian Being, and having unearthed the underlying unity and soundness of the Indian ideals, he was withal a monk enjoying the many adventures of the Sannyâsin life.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXIV

IN MADRAS AND HYDERABAD.

It was in the last days of the year 1892, when the Swami arose from his meditation at Kanya Kumari, and having fulfilled his vow, wended his way to Madras, a centre of orthodox learning and culture. Swimming once more to the mainland from the Shrine of the Mother, he went afoot, journeying through Ramnad and onwards, begging his food all the way for many days until he reached Pondicherry, a French Colony. Weary from long marches he rested there for some days, and met several young men who became his admirers and invited him to their homes.

It was at Pondicherry, where the Swami had a lengthy and bitter discussion with an exceedingly bigoted orthodox Pandit upon many important topics relating to Hinduism and to its reform. The Pandit, being of the old school, antagonised the Swami at every turn. He was not so much learned as he was violent, and he became brutal in his denunciation of the Swami's progressive ideas. The conversation turned on the question of sea-voyage, and the Swami told the Pandit that the time had come when Hinduism must take cognisance of itself, when it must contrast its glories, its culture and its worth with those of the civilisation of the West and adjust itself to the modern needs and problems. The Pandit met these remarks of the Swami with downright denunciation, saying that the Dharma was in need of no reform, that the Westerners were all *mlechchhas*, and that contact with the West would demoralise the Hindu nation. The conversation waxed hot and both the contestants were excited. The Swami felt, and righteously so, that the Pandit who had seen nothing outside of his own province was talking at random, and that it was this narrow conservative spirit, on the part of many others similarly disposed in

Koviloor Digital Library

thought, which was bringing about the degeneracy of the land. "My friend!" he cried out at last impatiently, "What do you mean? Upon every educated Indian devolves the responsibility of submitting the contents of the Dharma to the test. For this reason, we must come out of the limited grooves of the past and take a look at the world as it moves onwards to progress at the present day. And if we find that there are hidebound customs which are impeding the growth of our social life or disturbing our philosophical outlook, it is time for us to take an advance step by eschewing them." The Swami spoke also concerning the uplift of the masses, and said that the time was at hand when the Sudras would arise and demand their rights and privileges. He insisted that it was the duty of the educated Indians to help the down-trodden masses, by giving them education, to spread the ideal of social equality and to root out the tyranny of priestcraft and the evils of national disorganisation, which the perversion of the caste system and of the higher principles of religion had brought on. This was beyond the Pandit. He was embittered; and when the Swami was going on he made brutal gestures as much as to say, what could a wandering beggar-monk know, he was only a child! And he insistently tried to interrupt the Swami by blurting out "*Kadâpi na! Kadâpi na!*" which means "Never! Never!"

It was natural for him to do so as he was literally embedded in caste prejudices and in rigid social usages and so was fanatically opposed to reform of any kind. Nevertheless the Swami continued, endeavouring to show him from the standpoints of the Hindu Faith itself the sanctions for broadening the social outlook and breaking down the barriers of social distinction. He advocated the levelling influence of Buddhism, which he spoke of as the logical development of Hinduism," for with the Vedanta ideals of Oneness in the abstract, there should be a Vedantic social body, imbued with the doctrines of equality, fraternity and equal privilege, in the concrete. But he urged that the groundwork and the ideals of reform must be strictly Hindu. At the end, however, the Pandit

Koviloor Digital Library

appreciated the force of the Swami's arguments and the soundness of his views, though he still maintained that the *Kalapani*, or the black water of the ocean, was the great dividing line between Hinduism and the land of the *mlechchhas*, never to be crossed. In fact, what he had disliked was that the Swami, a comparatively young man, should dare to have questioned his learning and his orthodoxy.

Destiny works in strange ways. It so happened that Mr. Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya, then holding the influential position of Deputy Accountant-General of the Madras Presidency, chanced to meet the Swami plodding on his way up from Rameswaram, with staff and *kamandalu* in hand. Seeing him from the distance Mr. Bhattacharya thought, "Why, there is that same wonderful Sannyâsin whom I met at Trivandrum," and as they approached the two instantly recognised each other. They had met many weeks ago in Trivandrum, and Mr. Bhattacharya had learned to love and admire the Swami at that time. Hearing that he was on his way to Madras, this gentleman insisted that he should travel with him and become his guest there. The Swami consented, and so, remaining in Pondicherry for some days until Mr. Bhattacharya had completed the business for which he had come, both he and his host started for Madras. A few days before leaving, however, Mr. Bhattacharya had written to a friend in Mysore that the Swami was with him. This friend in turn informed Mr. Bhattacharya's Madras friends, and so when the Swami arrived with his host in Madras, there was awaiting him a dozen or so of the finest young men of the city, who in time became his disciples. From the very first day of his arrival the Swami was besieged, as it were, by numerous visitors. The news spread through the city that "A remarkable English-speaking San n has come !"

Indeed, from the time the Swami came to Madras, he may be said to have been on the high-road to public recognition. It was in Madras, where many of its most advanced young men became his devoted adherents. It was in Madras,

Koviloor Digital Library

where he rose to his highest levels and gained a group of staunch disciples who were largely instrumental in securing the funds wherewith he was enabled to go to America. It was in Madras where he was possibly most genuinely appreciated and where his summing-up of the ideals of Hinduism and of the message of his Master gained a ready acceptance. It was here, also, that later on his first work in India was commenced in the way of organisation and publication. It was his Madrasi disciples, who widely circulated his message even when he was working in the West.

The Swami had hardly made himself comfortable in his new surroundings when he was besieged by a band of eager inquirers who sought interviews with him. The conversations would commence on religion and end, perhaps, in psychology, science, literature or history. The Swami seemed to gauge any newcomer's personality at a glance. He was noticed to be possessed of a wide range of ideas and also to have the whole contents of Hinduism merged in a grand perspective of learning. And it so happened one day that some of those who came to the house of Mr. Bhattacharya, finding the Swami in a great mood in which he sublimated every thought, yoking it to the conception of the Absolute, asked him, "Swamiji, why is it that in spite of their Vedantic thought the Hindus are idolaters?" The Swami with a lightning flash in his eyes turned round on the questioner and answered, "Because we have the Himalayas!" He meant thereby that, surrounded by Nature so sublime and soul-stirring, man cannot but fall down and adore. He expanded his statement including in his synthesis of ideas the facts of religion as developments of organic evolution itself and as inseparably bound up with man's attitude towards the whole of Nature. He asserted that the human spirit must in some sublime mood respond to the impact of the beauty, harmony and grandeur of the universe around it. And he continued, showing the relationship between the worship of images and the psychology of concentration and the scope of ethics as applied to developing minds. He spoke of religion as organic

Koviloor Digital Library

and as bound up with the universe itself, saying that man did not make religion, but perceived it. His hearers were astounded at the penetration of the Swami's intellect. He upset all their comfortable notions of religion and their slipshod criticisms of it. He dignified religion and showed them that it was a perfect science, until its meaning struck their minds as comprehending the whole psychology of Nature and of Personality, and they saw in the Revelation of Man the Purposes of Nature itself.

Indeed, of that group which visited him, to those who were intellectual he himself was strenuously intellectual, overwhelming them with the incredible grandeur of his thought. And to those who were of a devotional character he spoke of Bhakti and of the *Avatâras* with such emotion in his voice as drew tears from the eyes of men who had never before felt a religious impulse. He would superimpose no ideas; he would encourage those who thought in special lines to realise the intellectual synthesis to which their thoughts would inevitably lead them. Some who came were agnostics, some even were atheists; some came for curiosity, some evidently to test and upset him, but he seemed to have a sympathetic attitude for their varied outlook. To the agnostic he would talk in one vein, to the atheist in another, always carrying conviction to their minds on the all-inclusive aspects of religion, by showing them how it was an organic element in the development of the processes of human evolution. He spoke of art and of science and of all other departments of knowledge as factors for the awakening of the spiritual consciousness, but he specified the practice of Religion itself as the immediate means to reach the trans-personal and super-sensuous consciousness, which is the very climax of spiritual evolution, where progress of personality ends because its contents have been dissipated by the attainment of Perfection and Individuality. For him who has possessed himself of the intense positiveness of that spiritual experience, there can be neither birth nor death, for when the body idea is superseded, both birth and death are

Kovilpur Digital Library

swallowed up and the soul realises itself as the One Inalienable Self. And in his conversation with the learned men of Madras, often assembled before him, he would speak of the religion of the Neolithic man and then, perhaps, transfer his thought to the philological comparison, showing how even in language Man is one. And then he would speak of the Vedanta, whose goal was the realisation of the underlying Oneness and of how the scientist participates in the search for this Oneness. And then he would speak of the ethics of the Vedanta as related to the most exalted emotions, such as those of the inner feeling of Oneness with all life and of immense strength, wherein the physical consciousness, encased in animal habits and in weakness and fear, is transcended.

The people of Madras who heard him were stupefied. This was the Vedas and the Vedanta metamorphosed into science and personal realisation at one and the same time. Each day brought to light new and hidden powers of the Swami. Perhaps to-day he would speak of Kalidas, Valmiki and Bhavabhuti, in the same breath as Byron and Shakespeare, Homer and Virgil. To-morrow he would speak of the Trojans and of the Pandavas, of Helen and of Draupadi. Now he would speak of the idealisation of the sensuous as manifested in Greek art and culture, and then he would contrast it with the whole trend of Hindu thought and culture towards the supersensuous. And in speaking of the psychology of Hinduism he would give his hearers entree into worlds of heightened perception of which they had never dreamed.

The Swami's personality towered over everything. His thrilling musical voice, his songs, his strength of soul, his powerful intellect, his luminous and ready replies, his scintillating wit, his epigrams and eloquence caught the whole field of attention of his hearers. And day after day the numbers of those who came to the house of Mr. Bhattacharya increased. He had a spirit of humility as well as an aggressive self-consciousness. Now perhaps he would

Kovilloor Digital Library

beg pardon of a Pandit who insulted him, calling himself a *murkha* or ignorant fellow. Then, perhaps, he would fall like a hurricane upon his audience, literally sweeping their minds into the currents of his thought. But all this was unostentatious, he being the teacher as were the Teachers of old, instructing privately and in the most informal manner. He spoke no harsh words against anyone, but he did not refrain from criticising when that was necessary. For example, there was the case of the Pandit who asked him if there was any harm in giving up *Sandhyâvandanâm* or prayers, performed in the morning, noon and evening, which he had had to do for lack of time. "What!" cried out the Swami almost with ferocity. "Those giants of old, the ancient Rishis, who never walked but strode, like whom if you are to think for a moment, you would be shrivelled into a moth, they, sir, had time and you have no time!" In that same meeting when a Westernised Hindu spoke in a belittling manner of the "meaningless teachings" of the Vedic Seers, the Swami fell upon him with a thunderbolt vehemence, crying out, "Man, a little learning has muddled your brain! How dare you criticise your venerable forefathers, how dare you bastardise the blood of the Rishis in your veins by speaking in such a fashion! Have you tested the science of the Rishis? Have you even as much as read the Vedas? There is the challenge thrown by the Rishis! If you dare oppose them take it up, put their teachings to the test, and they shall not be found wanting! What is making this race contemptible is just such intellectual bigotry and lop-sidedness as you manifest!"

To relieve the undue strain put upon himself by the constant influx of people, Swamiji used often to go for a walk in the evening to the sea-side. There seeing, one day, the wretched and half-starved children of the fishermen, working with their mothers, waist-deep in the waters, tears filled his eyes and he cried out, "O Lord, why dost Thou create these miserable creatures! I cannot bear the sight of them. How long, O Lord, how long!" Those who were in his company

Koviloor Digital Library

were overcome with seeing Swamiji so grieved at heart and burst into tears. These were the young men whom he had inspired with a love of country and a love for God.

Conversations would continue and the Swami would speak eloquently on the need of preaching the Dharma to the nations of the world, and of raising the masses in India. He would charge the audience to give back to the masses their lost individuality by throwing open to them that treasure which had been hidden for generations from them,– the learning of the Vedas and the Vedanta—if they wished India to rise! Whilst in this vein he would show that the millions upon millions of the depressed classes of Hindusthan were its only hope. And those who heard the Swami in these Divine hours were fired with the same thoughts. At this time also he condemned esotericism and occultism and would say to them, "None of this chasing after psychic power and miracle-mongering! Do not seek even personal salvation. Seek the salvation of others. Seek the redemption of the Dharma, the extension of the Indian spirit throughout the world. India is the heart of Asiatic culture, and upon the young men of India devolves the task of the remodelling of the Nation and the remodelling of the Dharma."

A party had been arranged in his honour one evening. All the intellectual luminaries of Madras were present there. Many of them were dazzled by the flashes of his intellect, and a small conspiracy of scholarly men was formed in a corner to attack him for the statement he had made. He had declared he was an Advaitin, boldly, almost challengingly. The clique put to him this question, "You say, you are one with God. Then all your responsibility is gone. What is there to check you when you do any wrong, and when you go astray from the right path?" The Swami turned round at once and gave the crushing reply, "If I honestly believe that I am one with God, I shall abominate vice and no check is needed!"

In the course of a similar conversation in the palace of the Rajah of Ramnad, some one jeered at him for his asser-

Kovilloor Digital Library

tion that it was possible for a human being to see Brahman, the Unknown. He was roused at once, took up the gauntlet and exclaimed, "I have seen the Unknown!"

Verily in the city of Madras the Swami was a dynamo of spiritual consciousness. He said that if the Hindu is accused of idolatry and the worship of Avatâras, what of the idolatrous imagination of the Christians with their credulous and bigoted worship of the Bible, and their fanatical belief in the Christ as the only begotten Son of God. "In India, however," he insisted, "if Sri Krishna and Rama and all the saints are proved to be mythical characters, the Vedas still remain, not as a source of blind and imperative faith, not as a rigid and an inflexible spiritual possession, but as a great body of teaching of Eternal Truths, of which more and more is to come in the way of revelation by the Enlightened Ones."

The Swami held several conversaziones at the Literary Society of Triplicane, which had given him his first introduction to the public; and many of those young men who came to him belonged to the social reform movement in Madras. But he saw that they were working from the wrong point of view, that of sweeping condemnation. In repeated talks the Swami emphatically urged upon them the necessity of critically analysing foreign ideals and of refraining from the assimilation of irreligious foreign culture. He said that they should invoke the aid of all that was great and glorious in the past, otherwise the very foundations of the national structure would be undermined. He told them that he was not an enemy of social reform; on the contrary, he himself yearned for reforms, but they must come from within, and not from without, and must be constructive and not destructive.

There came to him, the Assistant Professor of Science in the Christian College, by name Singaravelu Moodaliar. This man was an atheist. He saw the pragmatic values of Christianity and criticised Hinduism as its antagonists are wont to do. He came to argue, but at the end of the conversatioa he was converted to Swamiji's thoughts and be-

Koviloor Digital Library

came his ardent disciple. Swamiji loved him very much and called him by the epithet of 'Kidi.' He spoke of him afterwards in a merry mood, "Cæsar said, 'I came, I saw, I conquered'. But Kidi came, he saw, but—was conquered!" After a time this good disciple devoted his life in working for Swamiji's cause, and when at his suggestion, "Prabuddha Bharata" was started in Madras he became its honorary manager. He later renounced the world, led the life of a recluse and died a saintly death.

Mr. V. Subramanya Iyer says that he went with some of his class-fellows to the house of Mr. Bhattacharya, thinking to see a *tamasha*, that is, some fun. They wanted to test him by questions, with the pros and cons of which they came fortified. Mr. Iyer was at that time a student of the Christian College and had a great leaning towards Christianity which at one time he thought of embracing. He found the Swami smoking his *hooka* in a sort of half-awake, half-dreamy state, seeming to be in deep contemplation. Those who had accompanied Mr. Iyer, were somewhat taken aback by the very presence of the monk radiating power and by the marvellous superiority of his personality. Then one, bolder than the others, advanced to him, saying, "Sir, what is God?" The Swami smoked on as if entirely oblivious of the question asked. Then he raised his eyes, filled with luminous awareness and said as if in way of reply, "Well, my fellow, what is energy?" The boy made a prompt reply from his smattering of scientific knowledge, but the Swami upset his explanations. Then the others made efforts to answer. Again, without the slightest exertion the Swami set them at their wits' end. Finally they gave it up. Then the Swami roused himself and said, "What is this! You cannot define a simple word like 'energy,' which you use every day of your life and you want me to define God!" Then the Swami put the idea of God, and that of energy on such a high plane of thought that they felt themselves exceedingly small. They asked other questions, but the Swami's replies crushed them. He seemed impatient with their demoralised

Koviloor Digital Library

intellect and their silly efforts to upset the world of thought created by the Rishis. After a time the boys left, but Mr. Iyer was greatly impressed and remained with the Swami till the afternoon, when he accompained him with others to the sea-side for a walk. There the conversation went on, various important topics being discussed, and in the end it turned on the physical degeneracy of the Hindus as a race. Casually the Swami asked Mr Iyer, "Well, my boy, can you wrestle?" Receiving an answer in the affirmative the Swami said in fun. "Come, let us have a tustle." Surprised to see his athletic skill and his strength of muscle, Mr. Iyer called the Swami, "Palwan Swami," or the "Athlete Swami."

The Swami had a happy way of making himself beloved by everyone. Even the cook of Mr. Bhattacharya, though ignorant of his learning and grand philosophical flights, loved him, and he had good reason. For it so happened that one day the Swami found the man looking longingly at the *hookâ* which the Maharajah of Mysore had given him, and so he asked him, "Would you like to have this?" The man could not believe his ears. He thought that the swami was joking. A real Maharajah's *hookâ*! How could he gave it away! But the Swami repeated his question, and seeing the man puzzled and afraid to say yes, he then and there handed it to him. Still the man could not believe that he meant it. But when he actually had it in his hand, he was greatful beyond words, and those who heard of the incident saw what renunciation the Swami had, for he loved that *hookâ*.

It was customary with him throughout his life to give away whatever anyone admired in his possession. On one occasion in America a young man coveted the staff which he had used whilst journeying to many Tirthas during his *parivrâjaka* life. He had brought it all the way from India and prize it for its sacred associations. But he gave it away instantly, saying, "What you admire is already yours!"

In Madras the Swami gained numerous followers. The experience he had in Alwar was here intensified many times, for people flocked from all parts to hear him, and the house

Koviloor Digital Library

of Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya became a place of daily pilgrimage to young and old, to Pandits and gentlemen of position and culture. More and more he revealed the strength, the purity, the effulgence of his soul, and his sweet personality captivated their hearts even as his ideas captivated their intellects. All the experience of his travel, all the information he had gathered on his long pilgrimage throughout the land, served him remarkably well here in the enunciation of his great classification of the ideas and principles of Hinduism. He threw his whole soul into his utterances and after some three weeks' stay, Madras rung with his praises. Mr. K. Vyasa Rao, B. A., speaks as follows, in a reminiscent mood, of Swamiji of these days and the impression he created, in a paper read by him long after his passing away :—

"A graduate of the Calcutta University, with a shaven head, a prepossessing appearance, wearing the garb of renunciation, fluent in English and Sanskrit, with uncommon powers of repartee, who sang 'with full-throated ease' as though he was attuning himself to the spirit of the universe, and withal a wanderer on the face of the earth ! The man was sound and stalwart, full of sparkling wit, with nothing but a scathing contempt for miracle-working agencies preached at the footstools of Mahatmaic hierarchies ; one who enjoyed good dishes, knew how to appreciate the *hookâ* and the pipe, pet harped on renunciation with an ability that called forth admiration and a sincerity that commanded respect. The young Bachelors and Masters of Arts were at their wits' end at the sight of such a phenomenon. There, they saw the man and saw how well he could stand his ground in wrestling and fencing in the arena of the Universal Soul ; and when the hour of discussion gave way to lighter moods, they found how he could indulge in fun and frolic, in uncompromising denunciations and in startling *bon mots*. But everything apart, what endeared him to all was the unalloyed fervour of his patriotism. The young man who had renounced all worldly ties and freed himself from bondage, had but one love, his country, and one grief, its downfall. These sent him into reveries which held his hearers spellbound. Such was the man who travelled from Hugly to Tambrapurny, who bewailed and denounced in unmeasured terms the imbecility of our young men, whose words flashed as lightning and cut as steel, who impressed all, communicated his enthusiasm to some, and lighted the spark of undying faith in a chosen few."

To many the Swami seemed the very embodiment of the

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

culture of the Darsanas, the Agamas and the Yogas. He was saturated with the living consciousness not only of the Hindu spiritual experience but also of the philosophical and scientific achievements of the West. One who was highly cultured, and became his disciple in these days, spoke of him thus :—

"The vast range of his mental horizon perplexed and enraptured me. From the Rig Veda to Raghuvansa, from the metaphysical flights of the Vedanta philosophy to modern Kant and Hegel, the whole range of ancient and modern literature and art and music and morals, from the sublimities of ancient Yoga to the intricacies of a modern laboratory—everything seemed clear to his field of vision. It was this which confounded me and made me his slave."

Another disciple writes :—

"He frequently had to descend to the level of his questioners and to translate his soaring thoughts into their language. He would often anticipate several questions ahead and give answers that would satisfy the questioners at once. When asked how he so understood them, he would say with a smile that Sannyâsins were 'doctors of men,' and they were able to diagnose their cases before they administered remedies to them.

"At times many men's thoughts were his. He would answer scores of questioners at one stroke and silence them all.

"Soft and forgiving as he was to those on whom his grace rested, one had to live in his presence as in the vicinity of a dangerous explosive. The moment a bad thought entered one's mind it would flash across his also. One could know it from a peculiar smile that lit his lips and the words that would casually escape from his mouth in course of conversation."

Already he had announced his intention of going to the West. He said to all those who knew him in Madras, "The time has come for the propaganda of the Faith. The tims has come for the Hinduism of the Rishis to become dynamic. Shall we stand by whilst alien hands attempt to destroy the fortress of the Ancient Faith ? Are we satisfied with its impregnability ? Shall we remain passive, or shall we become aggressive, as in the days of old, preaching unto the nations the glory of the Dharma ? Shall we remain encased within the narrow confines of our own social groups and our provincial consciousness, or shall we branch out into the thought worlds of other peoples, seeking to influence these for the benefit of

Kovilpur Digital Library

Bharatavarsha ? In order to rise again India must be strong and united, and must focus all its living forces. To bring this about is the meaning of my Sannyâs !"

And those who listened saw with him the imperative need of preaching the Dharma. And they understood the intention of the Swami to sail for the distant shores of the West. Not only did they understand his intention, they themselves intensified it. They said, "It must be done, Swamiji, and you are the one man to do it. You will work wonders." Therewith they went forth eager to raise subscriptions for the cause. He himself had had it long in mind to attend the Parliament of Religions, but he took no definite step in this matter, preferring to abide by the will of the Mother. And those who went forth to collect funds soon gathered together some five hundred rupees. But the Swami, when he saw the money, grew nervous. He said to himself, "Am I following my own will ? Am I being carried away by sporadic enthusiasm ? Or is there a deep meaning in all that I have thought and preached ?" He pondered long until he passed into a mood of intense expectancy, praying, "O Mother, show me Thy will ! It is Thou who art the Doer. Let me be only Thy instrument." He, a Sannyâsin, inexperienced in the ways of the world, was about to sail for far distant lands, all alone and unknown, to meet strange peoples and deliver to them a strange message ! And so he said to the astonished disciples, "My boys, I have determined to force on the Mother's Will. She must prove that it is Her intention that I should go, for it is a step in the dark. If it be Her Will then money will come again of itself. Therefore, take this money and distribute it amongst the poor." His disciples obeyed him without a word, and the Swami felt as though a great burden had been taken off his shoulders.

He again settled down to the life of the Teacher, and prayed to the Mother and the Master in the solitude of his soul for guidance and direction. And in these days he meditated intensely, having much in the way of spiritual experience.

Kovilpur Digital Library

Oftentimes he would sing and sing to the Mother, and in the singing his soul would be carried away to high flights in the spiritual universe and the body would seem as a shell. His whole frame would shake with emotion and his spirit would reveal itself to him in supersensuous forms. His disciples being in his company were caught in the flames of ecstasy, and a great wave of spiritual glory descended upon them. The monk with the prodigious intellect and the fire of patriotism became transformed into a simple child waiting for the Mother's Call, and knowing that it would come. His soul grew tense with determination to *make* the Mother speak Her Will.

But while he was in this great devotional state, many of those in Hyderabad, who had heard of the Swami from their Madras friends, begged to have him on a brief visit. He readily consented, thinking that there must be a hidden purpose in this unexpected call. Indeed, the fame of the Swami had spread. From the unknown, wandering monk, he had grown into the Swami Vivekananda. His host at Madras telegraphed to a friend, Babu Madhusudan Chatterjee, the Superintending Engineer of His Highness the Nizam, to the effect that the Swami was to arrive in Hyderabad on the tenth of February and be his guest. On the day previous, the Hindus of Hyderabad and Secunderabad called a public meeting to arrange for a fitting reception for the Swami. So when he arrived in Hyderabad he was surprised to find on the station platform five hundred people assembled to receive him, including the most distinguished members of the Court of Hyderabad, several of the nobility and many rich merchants, pleaders and Pandits, notable amongst whom were, Rajah Srinivas Rao Bahadur, Maharajah Rambha Rao Bahadur, Pandit Rattan Lal, Captain Raghunath, Shams-ul-Ulma Syed Ali Bilgrami, Nawab Imad Jung Bahadur, Nawab Dula Khan Bahadur, Nawab Imad Nawaz Jung Bahadur, Nawab Secunder Nawaz Jung Bahadur, Mr. H. Dorabjee, Mr. F. S. Mundon, Rai Hukum Chand, M.A., L.L.D., Setts Chaturbhuj and Motilal, bankers, and the host and his son, Babu Kali Charan

Kovilloor Digital Library

Chatterjee. Babu Kali Charan who was known to the Swami in Calcutta, introduced each of these gentlemen to him. Flowers and garlands were heaped upon the monk. Writes an eye-witness as follows :—

"The Swami, then a young man of robust health, alighted from a first-class compartment, in the robes of a Paramahamsa, a *kamandalu* in hand. He was conveyed to the Bungalow of Babu Madhusudan, and was followed thither by many of the gentry. Those who could not go to the station came to have interviews at the Bungalow. Surely we have not witnessed such crowds before to receive a Swami in Hyderabad ! It was a magnificent reception, befitting a reigning Prince."

On the morning of the eleventh of February, a committee of one hundred Hindu residents of Secunderabad approached him with offerings of sweets, milk and fruits, and asked him to deliver a lecture at the Mahaboob College in their city. The Swami consented, fixing the thirteenth as the date. Then he drove with Babu Kalicharan to the fort at Golconda, a place associated with numerous historic memories and famous for its diamonds. On returning, the Swami found awaiting him a bearer from the Private Secretary to the Nawab Bahadur Sir Khurshid Jah, Amiri-i-Kabir, K. C. S. I., the foremost nobleman of Hyderabad and the brother-in-law of His Highness, the Nizam, requesting him to come to the palace for an interview on the following morning. So the Swami, accompanied by Babu Kalicharan, went at the appointed hour to the palace where he was received by an Aide-de-camp of the Nawab. Sir Khurshid Jah was well-known for his eclecticism in religion and was the first Mohammedan who visited all the Hindu places of pilgrimage from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. He warmly received the Swami and offered him a seat by his side.

For more than two hours the interview lasted, the Swami discussing the contents of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The Nawab took exception to the idea of the Personal God as represented in Hinduism, believing himself in the Impersonal Ideal. Then the Swami spoke to him on the evolution of the idea of God, and proved not only the necessity of the con-

Koviloor Digital Library

ception of Him as a Person, as a pragmatic factor in human experience, but also that it was the highest conception of human nature. That which is subjectively the Impersonal Divinity is objectively the Personal God ; He is the summation of all personality, the One Individual to which all personality is an approach. He pointed out that except Hinduism every other religion depended on the life of some person who was its founder, but Vedantism was based upon eternal principles and not upon persons, and as such it only could claim to be the universal religion. Rising higher and higher in his intellectual flights, the Swami introduced to the mind of the Nawab the whole background of religious ideas as having arisen from the inmost depths of human nature and out of the perception of the True. He said that all ideals were true, that all religious systems were special paths for the attainment of various ideals which, when intensified, were certain to draw out the Divinity within man. Then, taking into his discussion the ideas of the Absolute and the Vedanta, he stated that man was the greatest of all beings, for out of the human spiritualised intelligence all the truths of the universe had been discovered, and that man himself transcended all limitations and became Divine. And as he spoke, his face was luminous, his eyes were brilliant, and across the whole make-up of his personality there was a great Power manifest. He looked like a god analysing the contents of the whole human realisation. And—almost unconsciously,—he gave out his intention of going to the West to preach the gospel of the Eternal Religion. He grew fervent in his eloquence which deeply impressed the Nawab, and he interrupted him to say, "Swamiji, I am ready to help you in your undertaking with one thousand rupees." But the Swami declined to accept the money then and there, saying, "Your Highness, the time has not yet come. When the Command comes from On High I shall make you aware of it."

Taking leave of the Nawab, the Swami went to see the Mecca Musjid, Charminar, Falaknama, Nizam's palaces, Bashirbagh and other places of interest. On the morning of the

Koviloor Digital Library

thirteenth he met by appointment Sir Ashman Jah, K.C.S.I., the Prime Minister of Hyderabad, the Maharajah Norendra Krishna Bahadur, Peshkar of the State, and the Maharajah Shew Raj Bahadur, and all these noblemen promised their support for his proposed propaganda in America. In the afternoon he delivered a lecture at the Mahaboob College on "My Mission to the West". The chair was occupied by Pandit Rattan Lal. Many Europeans attended this lecture, and more than one thousand persons were present. The Swami was a revelation to all. He rose to his highest level. His command over the English language, his learning, his power of expression, his eloquence evoked admiration and praise from all. The Swami spoke of the merits of the Hindu religion, of the greatness of the culture of Hindu society in its resplendent days, and gave an outline of Vedic and post-Vedic learning. He spoke of the Rishis as the great Law-givers and organisers of the Shastras, and showed how the Puranas incorporated great ethical ideals. Finally he spoke of his Mission, "which is nothing less than the regeneration of the Motherland", and he declared that he felt it an imperative duty to go out as a missionary from India to the farthest West, to reveal to the world the incomparable glory of the Vedas and the Vedanta. The audience was electrified. On the next day the well-known bankers of the Begum Bazaar, headed by Sett Moti Lal interviewed him and they all promised to help him with his passage-money. Some of the members of the Theosophical Society and of the Sanskrit Dharma Mandal Sabha also came. On the fifteenth of February the Swami received a telegram from Poona, signed by the leading citizens in the name of the Hindu societies of the city, urging him to come on a visit there. But the Swami replied that he could not come then, and that he would be very happy to go whenever he could get a better opportunity. On the next day he went to see the ruins of the Hindu temples, the famous tomb of Baba Saraf-ud-din, and also the palace of Sir Salar Jung.

It was in Hyderabad where he met a famous Yogi, gifted

Koviloor Digital Library

with *siddhis*, or psychic powers. The Swami paid a visit to him, and found him to be a Brâhman of learning and culture who had given himself up to the training of the faculties of mind and had developed such subtle power that he could create at will many strange phenomena, almost incredible, as for example, that of producing from within his blanket heaps of any flowers and fruits named by the audience. When the Swami arrived he found the man laid up with high fever. The Yogi seeing a Sannyâsin before him asked him to sit near him, and regarding him by his signs to be a highly-developed spiritual soul, begged him to put his hand on his head. On Swamiji's doing so, the man felt all right and sat up. Hearing the object of his visit he showed him his wonderful feats. The Swami studied this man, pondering long over the phenomena he had witnessed, and finally came to the conclusion that they were of a subjective character and that by the development of the faculties of personality the greatest and most surprising phenomena could occur. Of course he was more readily aware than others of the possibility of these things, for on numerous occasions he had himself had personal experiences of a subjective character, which made him realise that the opportunities for self-perfection were endless. Some of his reflections on this incident and allied subjects are embodied in a lecture he gave in California called, "The Powers of the Mind".

On the seventeenth of February the Swami left Hyderabad. More than one thousand persons came to the railway station to bid him farewell. "His pious simplicity, unfailing self-control and profound meditation," writes Babu Kali Charan, "made an indelible impression on the citizens of Hyderabad."

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXV

THE CONSOLIDATION OF INTENTION.

When the Swami returned from Hyderabad to Madras, he was accorded an ovation by the many disciples he had made and who had come to the station to greet him. The Swami seemed now much more established in self-consciousness, for he had tested his oratorical powers before the assembly at the Mahaboob College and felt his influence over men. He knew now that he could sway vast assemblies as well as small gatherings of people. Indeed, in Belgaum he had told Mr. Mitra that a large audience draws out the powers of a speaker and makes him rise to the very apex of insight and self-expression. Once again in Madras the Swami continued, as before, to gladden the hearts of his followers with religious discourses and held conversations on an infinite variety of subjects. And each day brought new disciples and new devotees.

Whilst he was in Madras a strange experience happened to him. For some days,—though he spoke of it to no one—he was bothered by waves of psychic disturbance, which he found to have been sent out by certain suicides. At first he made light of the pressure caused upon his consciousness. The suicides then made all sorts of statements to make his mind uneasy, but which he later ascertained to be untrue. When they had thus annoyed him for some days, he remonstrated with them for their untruthfulness, but they answered him that they were in such a miserable plight, that truth and untruth were alike to them. They besought him to give them peace. Therefore, he thought over the matter and one evening repaired in an excited state of mind to the sea-shore to offer *pindas* with prayers for their repose. When he arrived there he found that he had not brought with him the ingredients wherewith to make the oblations. But he

Kovilloor Digital Library

remembered to have read in an old book that in want of rice and grains sand might be used as a substitute. So, taking in his joined palms great handfuls of sand for sacrifice, he offered them praying with his whole heart that these disembodied spirits might find rest. Thereafter they bothered him no more, having attained peace.

More and more as the days passed, the Swami was possessed with the idea of America. Sometimes his whole soul would be struggling for the feeling of certainty about his mission, as he knew that all things in America were against him, from the ordinary common-sense calculations; at other times he would be thrilled with anticipation, being delighted in extending the scope of his work, and also being eager for new experience and acquisition of new learning. In some sort of intuitional form he would be dimly aware of the great opportunity and success that awaited him, and he would talk with his disciples upon the mission that he felt was his to the peoples of the West. His great faith in himself and in his mission, was in the nature of a prophecy which he often experienced and expressed throughout his life. And certainly those who gave money towards his voyage later on, were actuated by a personal devotion to himself and by the hope that he would really be able to accomplish great things. Then also, his personality was intense, and he had a way of carrying conviction and inspiring others with his enthusiasm. Indeed, they did not put their trust in him on the strength of Sri Ramakrishna's words and prophecies concerning his future greatness, and of which he never spoke to them. Says Mr. Vyas Rao:—

"When the world discovered Vivekananda it discovered also Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, eight years after his passing away. People understood Sri Ramakrishna through the medium of his disciple, Vivekananda. .....and Sri Ramakrishna was taken for granted on the words of a young Sannyâsin who was so strange in himself. * * * *

"It was assuredly not because of Sri Ramakrishna that hopes which were realised to a remarkable extent were entertained of Swami Vivekananda; they were hopes centred in Vivekananda from what

Kovilloor Digital Library

the people of Madras had seen of him and felt convinced of him even as a man unknown to reputation then."

During the months of March and April the disciples of the Swami in Madras took definite steps to raise subscriptions for his passage to America. In fact, some went even to Mysore, Ramnad and Hyderabad for the purpose. Naturally, they visited those whom the Swami had made his disciples, or who were his outspoken admirers. Those, in particular, who had organised themselves into a subscription committee, as it were, were headed by Mr. Alasingha Perumal, a devoted follower of the Swami, who literally went from door to door begging. It was he and the young men under him who collected the major portion of the funds. They went for the most part to the middle classes, for the Swami had told them, "If it is the Mother's Will that I go, then let me receive the money from the People! Because it is for the People of India that I am going to the West,—for the People and for the poor!"

Prior to the time, however, when any large sum had been collected the Swami had passed through a great tumult of emotion concerning his intention. It was seen, when he was in Madras before his journey to Hyderabad, how he desired to learn directly from the Mother Herself if it were Her Will that he should go to the West. So to bring about a test, it was seen also, how he distributed the first five hundred rupees collected. He had given up, for the time being, any thought of the West, as was witnessed in his refusal to accept the sum offered him for this purpose by the brother-in-law of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Therefore, when he returned from the Nizam's dominions and found his disciples eager to collect funds and pressing him to follow out his intention in the near future, he thought, "Well, their readiness is perhaps the first sign!" Then, for some reason, he seemed to pass through a period of great uncertainty, not intellectual, however. He was quite settled in his mind both as to the necessity and the utility of it. Was the uncertainty, then, of a personal nature? Was it the thought of the doubtful fortune

Koviloor Digital Library

that must surely await an unknown Sannyâsin on his arrival in a strange land amongst strange peoples? Something seemed to tell him that an international assembly of preachers and divines of different faiths like the Parliament of Religions would be a great opportunity for bringing Hinduism to the hearing of the Western world. And yet there was no earthly reason for thinking so, for neither he himself nor his disciples knew how to proceed in those formalities that would constitute him a regular delegate. All that he could do was to set out on his own initiative trusting to the Lord. In this paradoxical state of mind the Swami prayed to the Mother and to his Master for guidance; his hours of prayer would be filled with a certain assurance, but yet he wanted actual vision in this regard. Mere feelings of assurance would not satisfy his discriminating mind; he must have the direct Command, the *Adesh*. Then, the thought occurred to him, "The Holy Mother is the visible embodiment of my Gurudeva. Let me write to her; She will be sure to advise me properly. And by her will I shall abide!" But some several days later, before he actually wrote to her, he had a Vision which altered matters entirely. Then he wrote to her, not asking for her permission to leave India but stating definitely that he was going to the West to preach Hinduism, and he begged her blessings and grace.

One night as he lay half-asleep the *Adesh* came to him in the symbol of a dream. And Sri Ramakrishna himself was the impelling impetus. The Swami saw the figure of the Master walking from the sea-shore into the waters of the ocean, and beckoning him to follow him! He awoke. A great peace and joy filled his whole being; and his mind seemed to have been impressed with the authoritative word, "Go!" The Vision sustained him. He thought it to be a direct Command from On High. All his doubts and misgivings were cleared away. All his nervousness left him.

But even as when he first set out upon the *parivrâjaka* life he had sought the blessings of Sarada Devi, so now he realised that her blessings on this more distant journey

Koviloor Digital Library

would surely bring about a similar success. After much meditation and much prayer he finally wrote to the Holy Mother. The letter was filled with reverence, tenderness, and love deified. He informed her of his resolve, saying that he was crossing the ocean in the name of the Lord, even as Hanuman did, and that he felt convinced that it was DESTINY that was driving him forth. He craved her blessings and made his *pranâms* to her. But one of the most important items in the letter was a charge that she should let no one know of his determination till she heard from him from the West. Having sealed the letter, he touched it to his forehead in an act of salutation, and then sent it off.

The feelings of the Holy Mother when she received this news may well be imagined. For many, many months she had not heard from him. And he being the most beloved disciple of her "Guru Deva" was cherished in her heart with a special affection. Moreover, she had had a most remarkable vision regarding him after the passing of the Master, in which she saw the form of Sri Ramakrishna entering into the body of Norendra, signifying that he would thenceforth work in and through his chief disciple. She had often thought of him and wondered where he might be. She would see him, in her mind's eye, wandering along afoot and weary, and her mother's heart would wish that she could be of service to him. But then she also knew the spiritual yearning and the spiritual glory that come upon the wandering monks; and so she resigned herself to the thought that, though he suffered he was blessed. Her heart desired to inform his brother-monks at Baranagore of his whereabouts, but he had charged her not to tell any one! So she respected his wish. How could she bless him on leaving India? Her natural impulse would have been to advise him *not* to go. But the Holy Mother saw deeply into the nature of the future. And as she struggled in her heart, lo, a vision, similar to that with which her "Noren" had been privileged, visited her likewise. Then she felt joyous; yes, now she could send him to the very ends of the earth, for the Master

Koviloor Digital Library

had spoken to her soul! And so she sent him her blessings and sanctioned the *Adesh* by informing him of her own Vision. She added many words of love and counsel. But still, there was a note of sadness and anxiety, for the Holy Mother is ever, indeed, a MOTHER to her spiritual sons.

When the Swami received this letter, he alternately danced and wept with joy. He went into his room to conceal his elation and later on to the sea-shore, and there by himself and in the solitude of his thought, his determination grew all of a sudden into prodigious proportions. And he said to himself, "Ah! It is all right now! It IS the WILL of the MOTHER!"

When he returned to the house of Babu Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya he was radiant. At the time quite a number of his disciples had assembled as usual to hear him discourse upon religious topics. What was their surprise, when the Swami entered, saying, "Yes, now it is THE WEST —THE WEST! Now I am ready. Let us get to work in right earnest. THE MOTHER HERSELF has spoken!" The disciples were fired with his enthusiasm and they went forth to collect the necessary means. And when they returned, they had much money, which they laid at the Swami's feet. Thus the Swami was well provided for. Then when every arrangement for sailing was about to be made, Jagmohanlalji, the Private Secretary to the Maharajah of Khetri, appeared on the scene and stopped all plans for the present.

About two years before, one saw the Swami at the Rajah of Khetri's palace. It will be recalled how the Prince had prayed to him to bless him that a son might be borne to him. Being earnestly insisted, the Swami had given him his benediction. Now,—a son had been born, an heir to the ancient Raj of Khetri. And the Prince in his excitement and in his joy called his Private Secretary and brother-disciple to his side, saying, "Jagmohan, we must have our Swamiji at the festivities! Without him, all our joy and happiness would be marred!" And Jagmohanlalji wishing to be of service to his master, and himself filled with a great love for the Swami

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

left at once for Madras, as he knew that he was there then assuring the Prince that he would be back with "Guruji" not a day later than could be helped.

Arriving at Madras Jagmohanlalji learnt by enquiries that the Swami was living at the house of Mr. Manmatha Nath Bhattacharya, and at once betook himself there. His first question to the servant who admitted him was, "Where is Swamiji?" The man answered, "He has gone to the sea." "What! Has he left, then, for the West? What do you mean?" cried out Jagmohanlal in despair, But at that moment he caught sight of a *gerruâ âlkhâllâ* hanging in the hall-way, and he thought, "He cannot have gone!" Jagmohanlal had not understood the servant's words. At this juncture a carriage dashed up to the front of the residence, and to his delight he saw the Swami alighting from it. He had only gone to the beach for an afternoon drive with his host. Instantly Jagmohan prostrated himself at full length upon the ground. The Swami was surprised to meet him so unexpectedly. The visitor immediately told him the reason for which he had come. But the Swami replied, "Dear Jagmohan, I am making preparations to embark for America on the thirty-first of May and only a month is left! How can I go to see the Maharajah now?" But the messenger persisted, saying, "Swamiji, you must come to Khetri even if only for a day! Rajahji will be overwhelmed with disappointment if you fail to come! You need not trouble yourself about making any arrangement for your going to the West. The Maharajah himself will see to it. You simply *must* come with me!" The Swami at length consented, and after some coversation it was decided that he should sail from Bombay. When all was ready for his starting for Khetri, there was a farewell scene which affected the Swami's heart. His Madrassi disciples fell prostrate before him, asking for his blessing. They accompanied him to the railway station; and the last that they saw of him was as he stood at the door of the railway carriage, raising his hand in solemn benediction. And as the train moved slowly out of the station, the name of the

Kovilpatti Digital Library

Lord rent the air, issuing forth from the mouths of scores of devotees.

It was late evening when the Swami arrived at Khetri and the palace of the Maharajah was lit up resplendently. Indeed, the festivities had commenced three or four days before and the whole city was beautifully decorated. Singing, dancing and music were in full swing on all sides. As the carriage that bore him and the Private Secretary drew up, the guard presented arms. The Rajah was at the time in his State barge which was richly decorated with flowers, garlands and palms, as well as with pearls and jewels; and surrounding him were seated his state-guests, some of whom were the Princes and Chiefs of Rajputana, and music was going on. When Jagmohanlal presented himself with Swamiji, the Maharajah rose from his seat and prostrated himself before his *guru*. The Swami blessed him and taking him by the hand, raised him up. All present also rose to their feet and bowed before him. The musicians sang a song of welcome as he was led to a seat of honour. Then the Maharajah formally introduced him to the assembled guests, and made known to them how the Swami had blessed him that a son might be born to him, and also of the Swami's decision to visit the West to preach the profound doctrines of the Sanatana Dharma. At this the whole court cheered. Then the babe was brought to receive the blessings of the monk. Festivities and the festive spirit had full sway, and amidst it all the Swami discoursed to the Rajah and his fellow-princes on religious matters. The Rajah was beside himself with joy at being in the Swami's company. Such is the power of the Sannyâsins, if they but awaken to the sense of the dynamic force of religion! Aye, then, even the Princes of the land would be the enthusiastic advocates of the Sanatana Dharma in and through them!

After a few days, the Swami informed the Rajah that it was now time for him to be off to Bombay to make preparations for the voyage. On hearing this the Prince was visibly moved and said, "Well, Swamiji Maharaj, it wrings my heart to part with you. But I must bow to Providence. I shall

Kovilpatti Digital Library

however accompany you as far as Jeypur !" On the Swami's remonstrating the Rajah said, "It is a host's duty to see his guest off, at least to the confines of his residence!" Thereupon he and the Swami attended by Jagmohanlal travelled by the State bullock-carriage to Jeypur. The Prince then ordered his Private Secretary to accompany the Swami to Bombay and gave into his keeping a good sum of money towards the expenses of the Swami's journey and for providing him with everything necessary for his voyage. After seeing Swamiji into a first-class compartment reserved for him the Rajahji bade him farewell with a heavy heart.

Alighting at the Abu Road Station, the Swami spent the night in the house of a railway-servant, who had been one of his kind hosts in the days of his wandering life. At the railway station before resuming the journey the Swami had rather an unpleasant experience with a European ticket-collector. A Bengali gentleman, an admirer of the Swami, was talking with him sitting in the Swami's compartment, when the man ordered him rudely out of the carriage, citing a railway regulation. The gentleman, who was also a railway servant mildly protested saying, that there was no such regulation to compel him to leave his place; but this only enraged the man the more. Then the Swami himself intervened, which did not mend matters, for the man then addressed himself to him, sharply saying, "*Tum Kahe Vat Karteho ?*" which means, "Why dost thou meddle?" The Hindi word, "*tum*" or "thou," one addresses only to inferiors, and "*âp*" is used in the same sense as an expression of respect. At this, the Swami became indignant and said, "What do you mean by "*tum*"? Can you not behave properly? You are attending to first and second class passengers and you do not know manners! Can't you say "*âp*"? The ticket-collector, seeing his mistake, said, "I am sorry. I don't know the language well. I only wanted this man——." More vexed the Swami interrupted him with, "Sir! Just now you said you did not know Hindi well. Now I see that you do not even know your own language. This "man" of whom you

Koviloor Digital Library

speak is a *gentleman!*" The ticket-collector was by this time the object of many criticising glances from the crowd of spectators that had gathered round the carriage, and feeling himself humiliated, he left the compartment, whilst the Swami called out to him, "Give me your name or number. I shall report you." Hearing this, the man hastened his steps all the more and was soon lost in the crowd. Talking of this incident to Jagmohanlal, the Swami said, "You see what we need in our dealings with Europeans is self-respect. We do not deal with men according to their positions, and so they take advantage of us. We must keep up our dignity before others. Unless we do that, we expose ourselves to be trifled with and insulted by them. This is demoralising to us. The Hindus as a race are, in point of fact, far superior to others in civilisation. But through want of a genuine assimilation of their culture, they think themselves inferior to others. Consequently, it has come to such a pass that any third-rate foreigner comes and makes them pocket insults and kicks."

The Swami and his companion went on to Bombay, where they were met at the station by Alasingha Perumal, who had come all the way from Madras to bid farewell to the Swami. The Rajah of Khetri had instructed Jagmohanlalji to make every possible arrangement for the comfort of the Swami. Therefore, he took the latter to the best shops in the city and purchased all manner of things for him. The Swami protested when he found his friend ordering costly silk materials for his *âlkhâllâs* and turbans, and other expensive suits to be used when he would lecture in the West. He said that a simple *gerruâ* robe would do, but the other would hear nothing of the kind. The Swami was therefore fitted out right royally, and was presented with a handsome purse. A first-class ticket had been purchased for him on the Peninsular and Orient Company's Steamer, "Peninsular," Jagmohanlalji maintaining that a *guru* of a Maharajah should travel as befits a prince. The Swami found himself helpless against the pious intentions of his disciple. The few intervening days he passed in silent meditation, in going to see his good

Koviloor Digital Library

friends of other memories, and in holding religious discourse with those who cared to come.

But often his mind reverted to Baranagore in far-off Bengal. Yes,—the monastery! He wondered how it fared with his *gurubhâis* at this time; he hoped that all was well. If he could but have known, the monks of Baranagore often spoke of him, with loving solicitude, asking themselves, "Where is Noren? Where may Noren be?" And they raised their hearts in prayer to the Master for his welfare. And day after day the same round of prayer, meditation, service and religious discourse was carried out, even as the Leader had initiated them. No, they did not know definitely where he was. But so great were their hope and faith in him that when they first heard of his great triumph in America, they were almost certain that the "Swami Vivekananda" was no other than he who was their own beloved *gurubhâi*. For the Swami was known by the name "Vivekananda" only shortly before his leaving for the West. Prior to that he had changed his name several times, indeed, as often as he had found it necessary to avoid recognition and publicity. Now he was known as "Vividishananda," now as "Sachchidananda," and so on. It is said that he finally assumed the name Vivekananda at the earnest entreaty of the Rajah of Khetri. "Vivekananda" means "Bliss in Discrimination" and, indeed, it was this name that suited him best of all, for he was verily discrimina tion incarnate. It was by this name that he became known the world over, and it was this name which he kept until the end of his life.

As the days went by, the Swami felt that he was thus fulfilling the will of the Master by sailing for the unknown West. And yet, even in these days of strenuous excitement he often grew grave over the study of India. The "feast of reason and the flow of soul" that he gave out in Madras continued here in Bombay even to the last moments before his departure, and one hears him breathing out the synthesis of India. He said, "India must rise to its inherent spiritual status, as the Teacher of the world. A centre there is,

Koviloor Digital Library

around which all the different forces which contribute to the well-being of the land should concentrate. The task of seeing and assimilating the unity in variety is the task set before every nation. Differences should never stand in the way of Self-determination, Self-expansion, and Self-realisation. To every one is given the right to worship one's own Ideal with the *mantra-pushpa* of his own outlook on life. The differences are only on the surface. The spiritual life is the unity to which the collective idealism of the Indian nation may ascend. What matters whether one cry out 'Hara Hara Vyom Vyom!' or 'Shivoham Shivoham!' or 'Wah Guruki Fateh!' or 'Alla'ho Akbar'? In the mingling of these great notes of faith and race culture, the Motherland shall become One. This is the task before the Indian peoples,—the intensification of a united purpose, the organisation of a life of service to others, the elimination of privilege, the raising of the masses, the constant spiritualisation of the national outlook, and, above all, a righteous and positive Self-consciousness. When the need of this task is perceived and when the responsibility it involves is patriotically shouldered, then even in and through the very distinctions and differences of the Indian peoples, there will be a manifestation of their unity, power and glory!"

Finally the day arrived—the thirty-first of May, 1893. The ship, the bidding of farewells, the many anxieties of foreign travel, to which the Swami as a Sannyâsin was unaccustomed,—all these things were new to him. Then, too, at the insistence of his friends he had been made to dress himself in a robe of ochre silk and a turban of the same material. Indeed, he looked like a prince. But his heart was consumed by various emotions. There was much heart-aching all round; Jagmohanlalji and Alasingha Perumal accompanied him up the gangway and remained until the very last moment when the great gongs of the ship struck. Jagmohanlalji had seen to it that the Swami had his berth and the formalities of travel arranged. When finally the moment of departure came, there were tears in their eyes. They prostrated themselves

Koviloor Digital Library

at his feet in final salutation and left the ship, which soon after started on its course.

The Swami stood on the deck looking towards the land until it faded out of sight, and constantly sending out his benediction to those who loved him and whom he loved so tenderly. His eyes were filled with tears; his heart was overwhelmed with emotion. He thought of the Master, of the Holy Mother, and of his *gurubhâis*. He thought of INDIA and her culture, of her greatness and her sufferings, of the Rishis and of the Dharma. And his heart seemed as if about to burst with love for his native land. As the ship moved on,—he knew that his whole being was attuned to every pulsation of the Mother-Heart, and he felt that each single grain of the dust of India was the holiest of the holy. Slowly he was encompassed by the black waters of the ocean, and he murmured under his breath, "Verily, from the Land of Renunciation I go to the Land of the Enjoyment of the World!" But it was to be no enjoyment for him. It was to be work, work, strenuous, terrible work and struggle, and much difficulty and asceticism. That work was to break his body to pieces; he was not to know any rest. He was to spend but nine years more of life, and that in service and often in sorrow. He breathed the sacred name of his Master and that of the Divine Mother of the Universe almost audibly. Yes, he, the great seer of the Vedic Wisdom, was always and everywhere the Child of the Mother, and the Disciple of his Master!

The ship moved on its way southward to Ceylon; and the Swami was alone with his thoughts and the vastness of the sea.

Before taking leave of the Swami on his way to the West for the purpose of representing India and its spiritual ideals and culture at the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago, it would be appropriate to conclude the chapter with the following words of a well-known writer who shows at a

Koviloor Digital Library

glance how well the Swami had fitted himself for his glorious mission :—

"During his travels, by turns he realised the essence of Buddhism and Jainism, the spirit of Ramananda and Dayananda. He had become a profound student of Tulsidas and Nischaldas. He had learned all about the saints of the Maharashtra and the Alwars and Nayanars of southern India. From the Paramahamsa Parivrâjakâchârya to the poor Bhangi Mehtar disciple of Lalguru he had learnt not only their hopes and ideals, but their memories as well. To his clear vision the Moghul supremacy was never an interregnum in the continuity of Indian national life. Akbar was Hindu in breadth of vision and boldness of synthesis. Was not the Taj, to his mind, a Sakuntala in marble? 'The songs of Guru Nanak alternated with those of Meerabai and Tansen on his lips. The stories of Prithvi Raj and Delhi jostled against those of Cheetore and Pratap Singh, Siva and Uma, Radha and Krishna, Sita-Ram and Buddha. Each mighty drama lived in a marvellous actuality, when he was the player. His whole heart and soul was the burning epic of the country, touched to an overflow of mystic passion by her very name.' He held in his hands all that was fundamental, organic, vital; he knew the secret springs of life. There was a fire in his breast, which entered into him with the comprehension of essential truths, the result of spiritual illumination. His great mind saw a connection where others saw only isolated facts ; his mind pierced the soul of things and presented facts in their real order. His was the most universal mind, with a perfect practical culture. What better equipment could one have who was to represent before the Parliament of Religions, India in its entirety—Vedic and Vedantic, Buddhistic and Jain, Saivic and Vaishnavic and even Mohammedan? Who else could be better fitted for this task than this disciple of one who was in himself a Parliament of Religions, in a true sense?"

And his hope for India was, "An Islamic body with a Vedantic heart," or put otherwise, the spirit of a democratic and unified consciousness, impelled and actuated by the highest spiritual ideals. Such was the man and the monk—Vivekananda!

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXVI

ON THE WAY TO LANDS BEYOND THE SEAS.

As the ship steamed onwards the Swami accustomed himself gradually to its motion and its novelty. At first he felt himself much worried with having to take care of the many things which he had with him in the way of possessions. This proved to be one of his greatest crosses. He, the *parivrâjaka*, whose sole belonging had been in former times a *kamandalu*, was now burdened with a tourist's outfit of trunks, valises and a wardrobe! How mysterious is the Providence that regulates the destiny of him who has given himself over at the Feet of the Lord! With the exception of this trouble, the Swami was highly satisfied with his varying experiences on board the steamer. His romantic temperament and his rich imaginative nature saw beauty, in a thousand forms, in each swelling and falling of the waters, in each gust of wind, in each cloud above. The expanse of the sea, the invigorating air, the onward ploughing through the mighty waters, the atmosphere of freedom from care, and the courtesy of all aboard, which characterise a sea-voyage reconciled the Swami to his new surroundings. The rising or the setting of the sun spoke volumes to him, and the splendid canopy of the starry sky at night, the placid state of the sea at moments when all is peace, and the sense of vastness which the sea suggests,—all these varying phenomena produced in him different exalted states of mind.

Once out of India, with his thought disentangled from the web of relationship, he saw the wisdom of his having sailed. Indeed as early as September 20, 1892, in a letter to the Panditji Maharaj of Porebander with whom he had read in the memorable *parivrâjaka* days the Mahâ-Bhâshya of Pânini, he had penned the words,—"So you see, we must travel, we must go to foreign parts. We must see how the engine of

Kovilloor Digital Library

society works in other countries, and keep free and open communication with what is going on in the minds of other nations, if we really want to be a nation again."

The Swami was happy after he had been on the ship for several days. Then, too, his commanding presence, his courtly manner, his intelligent face, his manly bearing,—everything about him proved in his favour with his fellow-passengers. On a ship each passenger finds the caste-fellows of his board temperament and thought, as it were, and makes a chance, and often intimate, acquaintance with those to whom he is attracted. In the instance of the Swami, from the very first, everyone admired "the orange-robed Oriental with the luminous countenance and the tiger-like carriage." Often the Captain, when at leisure, would join the Swami in his solitary walks. He showed him the entire ship, explaining to him the mechanism of the engines, which the Swami closely examined. He soon accommodated himself to the strange food, the strange environment and the strange people, and by watching others he acquainted himself with the manners and customs of the Europeans. He made a number of friends, several of whom were Germans.

It was not long before the steamer reached Colombo; here a halt was made for almost a whole day. The Swami made use of the opportunity to visit the city. He drove through the streets, in the course of which he visited a temple, rich with Buddhistic imagery, and was fascinated at seeing the image in it, which was "a very gigantic *Murti* of the Lord Buddha, in a reclining posture, entering Nirvâna." The day passed all too soon for him; and it was again—the steamer. The next station was Penang, "a strip of land along the sea in the body of the Malay Peninsula." The Swami learned that the Malays were Mohammedans, that the place had been infested in the olden days with pirates. "But now" wrote the Swami, "the leviathan guns of modern turreted battleships have forced the Malays to look about for more peaceful pursuits." On his way from Penang to Singapore, he had glimpses of Sumatra, with its high

Koviloor Digital Library

mountains, and the Captain pointed out to him several places as the favourite haunts of pirates in days gone by. The Swami was as happy as a child at seeing new and strange lands. He thought of the time when the seamen of his own province of Bengal had gone out upon the high seas, on their way to China and Japan, touching these same ports and colonising some of them; and he thought of the civilisation they had carried with them to these distant shores.

The next halting-place was Singapore, the capital of the Straits Settlements. He went to see the Botanical Garden with its beautiful collection of palms. He found mangosteen and the bread-fruit tree in abundance everywhere. He found that the people of Singapore, though so near the line of the Madras belt, were not half so dark as the people of that Indian city. He did not leave Singapore without visiting its splendid museum.

The next port was Hongkong, where the Chinese element predominates in all labour and all trades, and where one gets a glimpse of China itself. The Swami had studied much regarding China in his youth. The name spelt to him the land of dream and of romance; but he found that there were no greater commercial people than the Chinese. He was interested to see the great rush of crafts that swept in and about the great steamer, and was amused by the way their owners implored the travellers in various dialects and in broken English to come to shore in their boats. It was a swarm of life and restlessness. In a humourous vein, the Swami writes in his letter from Yokohama :—

"These boats with two helms are rather peculiar. The boatman lives in the boat with his family. Almost always the wife is at the helms, managing one with her hands and the other with one of her feet. And in ninety per cent. cases you find a baby tied to her back, with the hands and feet of the little Chin left free. It is a quaint sight to see the little John Chinaman dangling very quietly from his mother's back whilst she is now setting with might and main, now pushing heavy loads, or jumping with wonderful agility from boat to boat. And there is such a rush of boats and steam launches coming in and going out. Baby John

Koviloor Digital Library

is every moment put to the risk of having his little head pulverised, pig-tail and all ; but he does not care a fig. This busy life seems to have no charm for him, and he is quite content to learn the anatomy of a bit of rice-cake given to him from time to time by the madly busy mother. The Chinese child is quite a philosopher and calmly goes to work at an age when your Indian boy can hardly crawl on all fours. He has learned the philosophy of necessity too well. Their extreme poverty is one of the causes why the Chinese and the Indians have remained in a state of mummified civilisation. To an ordinary Hindu or Chinese, everyday necessity is too hideous to allow him to think of anything else."

At Hongkong the passengers had to halt for three days waiting for transit to Japan. And as Canton was only eighty miles up the Si Kiang river, the Swami decided to join the band of German travellers in a visit to this Chinese city. His impressions are best described in his own words :

"What a scene of bustle and life ! What an immense number of boats almost covering the waters ! And not only those that are carrying on the trade, but hundreds of others which serve as houses to live in. And quite a lot of them so nice and big ! In fact, they are big houses two or three stories high, with verandahs running round and streets between and all floating ! • • Around us on both sides of the river for miles and miles is the big city—a wilderness of human beings, pushing, struggling, surging, roaring."

Indeed, Canton proved to be a revelation to the Swami. The interpreter who accompanied the party, was interrupted by the Swami with numerous questions and remarks. He learned that the high-caste Chinese lady can never be seen, and that there is as strict a zenana in China as is in vogue amongst the Hindus of Northern India. He found that even many of the women of the labouring classes had "feet smaller than those of our youngest child, and of course they cannot be said to walk, but hobble." In Canton, the Swami visited several of the more important temples. And the very largest of these was dedicated to the memory of the first Buddhist Emperor and the five hundred first disciples of Buddhism. Entering the temple he found an imposing figure of Lord Buddha in the central position, and beneath him was the image of the Emperor in reverent and meditative attitude, in a great grouping of five hundred images of the disciples of the

Koviloor Digital Library.

Lord. He studied the ancient school of Buddhist sculpture and he wondered at the beautiful works of art in these images carved from wood. He studied the architecture of the temples, finding many points of similarity between it and the Buddhist architecture as is met with in India. He saw, also, many points of contrast, and he delighted in their originality. He saw the soul in all that came under his observation. He saw the whole soul of China, as it were, and his great knowledge of Buddhism made him an inhabitant of the Buddhist-Chinese world.

During the short time that he was in Canton, the Swami reflected much upon the Chinese nation. He saw its inherent and intrinsic worth ; he perceived the great dormant potentialities of this huge body of humanity. And he said, as he did often afterwards, "China is the Coming Nation!" His mind ran from the sacred to the secular, and he gathered that the Chinese were by instinct business men and financiers. He saw that a ceaseless energy forced them to ceaseless toil ; and he reflected that India must acquire this commercial culture and this same indomitable energy.

But as a monk his earnest desire was to see a Chinese monastery. Unfortunately, these monasteries were on grounds forbidden to foreigners. What could be done? He asked the interpreter, only to be told that it was impossible. But this served to intensify his desire. He *must* see a Chinese monastery! He said to the interpreter, "Suppose a foreigner goes there, what then?" and he received as reply, "Why, sir, they are sure to maltreat him!" The Swami thought that the monks would not surely hurt him if they knew that he was a Hindu Sâdhu. He persisted and finally induced the interpreter and the Germans to tread on the "forbidden ground," saying laughingly, "Come, let us see if they will kill us!" But they had not gone far when the interpreter cried out, "Away! Away! Gentlemen! They are coming, and they are infuriated!" Some two or three men were seen approaching with rapid steps, with clubs in hand. Seeing their menacing appearance, the Germans ran off, and the

Koviloor Digital Library

interpreter was about to take to his heels when the Swami seizing him by the arm said to him with a smile, "My good man, you must not run away before you tell me what the Chinese call an Indian Yogi in their language." Having been told this, the Swami called out to the men in a loud voice that he was an Indian Yogi. And lo, the word Yogi acted like magic! The expression of the angry men changed to that of deep reverence and they fell at his feet. They arose and stretched out their joined palms in most respectful salutation; and then said something in a loud voice, of which one word the Swami understood to be "*Kabatch.*" He thought it was undoubtedly the Indian word, meaning amulet. But to be sure of what they meant, he shouted out, for an explanation to the interpreter who stood at a safe distance, greatly confounded at the strange development of events,—and well he might be, for never in all his experience had he witnessed such a spectacle as this. The man told him, "Sir, they want amulets whereby to ward off evil spirits and unholy influences. Sir, they desire your protection" The Swami thought for a moment, as he was not a charm-giving Sâdhu. Suddenly he decided upon something, and taking a sheet of paper from his pocket divided it into several pieces, and then wrote on each separate bit the word, "Om" in Sanskrit, the most holy word of the Vedas and the symbol of the highest transcendent truth. He gave them the bits of paper, and the men, touching it to their heads, bowed down before him, and then led him into the monastery.

When the Swami entered the more isolated portions of the building he was shown into a room where he saw many Sanskrit manuscripts written, strange to say, in old Bengali characters. And then it occurred to him, that when he had visited the templed edicated to the First Buddhist Emperor he had been struck with the unmistakable resemblance of the faces of the five hundred followers of the Lord with those of the Bengalees. These evidences, as also his past study of Chinese Buddhism, convinced him that Bengal and China had at one time been in close communication, that there must have been at one time

Koviloor Digital Library

a great influx of Bengali *bhikshus* in China, who brought to that distant country the Gospel of the Blessed One, and that Indian thought had dominated Chinese civilisation in a remarkable way.

The trip to Canton was one of the most pleasant and instructive that the Swami ever had. His memories of China were multiple. And what another would have taken a great period of time to learn concerning this "Coming Nation" he perceived in a casual visit; but then he was a student of students, one who brought the power of spiritual concentration to bear upon social, civic and international problems and, indeed, upon all topics of observation and research. From Canton the journey was back to Hongkong; then he was again on the ocean for many days, finally arriving at the port of Nagasaki in Japan, where he drove through the town and was greatly impressed with everything he saw. Thus wrote the Swami in the first letter to his Madras disciples:—

"The Japanese are one of the cleanliest peoples on earth. Everything is neat and tidy. The streets are nearly all broad, straight and regularly paved. Their little houses are cage-like, and their pine-covered evergreen little hills form the background of almost every town and village. The short-statured, fair-skinned, quaintly-dressed Japs, their movements, attitudes, gestures, everything is picturesque. Japan is the land of the picturesque! Almost every house has a garden at the back, very nicely laid out according to Japanese fashion with small shrubs, grass-plots, small artificial waters and small stone bridges."

From Nagasaki the ship sailed on to Kobe. Here the Swami disembarked, and took the land route to Yokohama with a view to see the interior of Japan, planning to meet the steamer again at Yokohama. He visited three of the larger cities, Osaka, the great manufacturing town, Kioto, the former capital, and Tokio the present capital. During his short sojourn in Japan he penetrated into the essential elements of its national life and acquainted himself with the customs and the culture of the people. But what struck him most was the modern rage for progress which was spontaneous in every department of knowledge and in every community. He wrote:—

Kovilpur Digital Library

"The Japanese seem now to have fully awakened themselves to the necessity of the present times. They have now a thoroughly organised army equipped with guns, which one of their own officers has invented, and which is said to be second to none. Then, they are continually increasing their navy. I have seen a tunnel nearly a mile long, bored by a Japanese engineer. The match factories are simply a sight to see; and they are bent upon making everything they want in their own country. There is a Japanese line plying between China and Japan, which shortly intends running between Bombay and Yokohama."

In all these cities he visited, he made a point of seeing all the important temples and studying the rituals and ceremonies observed in them. To his amazement he found that here also the temples were inscribed with Sanskrit *mantrams* in old Bengali characters, though only a few of the eccleasiastics knew Sanskrit, and that the modern spirit had penetrated even the priesthood. He was especially delighted to discover that, "To the Japanese India is still the dreamland of everything high and good."

In his letter from Yokohama to the group of disciples in Madras, from which some of the descriptions of his travels until now are quoted above, one sees the Swami vigorously denouncing the evils of his country, in order to rouse it from the state of inertia into which it had sunk by the enervating influence of priestcraft and the social tyranny of ages. He had done that often before, but once out of the land he gained a much clearer perspective and found that the system which disregarded the masses and trampled them under foot, was the root of all India's evils. Not that he failed to understand the learning and the sanctity of true Brâhmanical culture, but that he stood against its prostituting the true ideals of that culture and making of its high status a weapon for social aloofness and tyranny. This was of caste, he knew, and not of religion. It was a social, not a religious phenomenon. He did not rant against the Brâhmanical culture. Indeed, he revered it. What he desired was that Indians should "Come out and be men!" He wrote in that letter: "India wants the sacrifice of at least a thousand of her young men,—men, mind, and not brutes. * * *

Koviloor Digital Library

How many men, unselfish, thorough-going men, is Madras ready now to supply, to struggle unto death to bring about a new state of things—sympathy for the poor—bread to their hungry mouths—enlightenment to the people at large—and struggle unto death to make men of them who have been brought to the level of beasts, by the tyranny of your fore-fathers?". This intense note of criticism, enthusiasm and inspiration which came from Yokohama stirred the hearts of the disciples of the Swami in Madras. The Swami was a critical analyser and a daring critic of his nation's character! This letter shows the powerful spirit of the Swami as a Guru and the overwhelming conviction with which he spoke, for he was no respecter of persons. It shows also how his heart was always Indian, and the outburst is that of a patriot who travelling abroad finds in other nations a more modern, organised and self-reliant public life and desires it to become the property of his native land.

From Yokohama, the Swami sailed across the vast Pacific. Days and days were consumed in travel. Alternately he read and meditated, studying the greatness of human life, constantly holding communion with the Highest Reality and at all times thinking synthetically concerning India. Most of the time he was serious, wondering what America would bring forth for him in the way of the realisation of his mission. Thus the days went by in thought and prayer until he reached the West, until he reached the shores of far-off America, the land of his vision and his hope, where he was to become glorified and transfigured as a Prophet amongst the peoples of the earth.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXVII

EARLY DAYS IN AMERICA.

From Yokohama to Vancouver—from the Old World to the New World! As the ship drew near to the port of Vancouver in British Columbia the Swami saw from a distance the land of his hopes, whither he had gone for the good of India and for the preaching of the Dharma. Alternately anxious and joyous feelings held mastery over his spirit, but when he landed on American soil, he felt that he was equal to any occasions that might arise. Form want of warm clothing he had suffered much on board the ship from cold, for, though he was provided with a handsome wardrobe, it did not occur to him or to his disciples that this summer voyage by the Northern Pacific would be at all cold. Remaining in Vancouver for a short time he boarded a train for the far-off city of Chicago. Through Canada for two or three days he journeyed by rail, on and on, seeing much of the American continent, and was struck with awe at the sight of the monumental Rocky mountains, through which the train made its way. The scene along the route was in many instances sublime, and in many other instances it was beautiful beyond words. Thus the Swami passed the time in much joyous excitement, when not in that state of recollection into which he often entered, as all monks should. Through cities after cities the train carried him, until finally on the third day he found himself, bewildered as a child, in the mazes of the city of Chicago. Being unused to handling money and to the ways of travelling in a foreign land, the Swami had been robbed and imposed upon at every stage of his journey until he arrived at Chicago.

What the state of the Swami's mind was when he reached Chicago can well be imagined. Unaccustomed to travelling, he was burdened with his possessions; he did

Koviloor Digital Library

not know where to go. His strange dress made him conspicuous and there were lads who ran after him in amusement. He was weary and confused. The porters were demanding exorbitant charges for having carried his luggage from the train to the waiting-rooms of the huge station. On all sides there was a great mass of humanity, swarming hither and thither, chiefly visitors to and from the World's Fair. The Swami at length went with one of the hotel clerks, who made it clear to him that his hotel was the best in every way. Feeling that in a strange land he had better put up at a better-class hotel, he had consented. After a short drive he found himself entering a marbled lobby of one of the fashionable hotels, and was soon taken up by the elevator to the floor on which was the room appointed to him. When the porters had brought his luggage and he found that he was no longer to be interrupted, he sat down amidst his trunks and satchels and tried to calm his mind. And in a short time he was quite oblivious of his surroundings and entered into that same state of meditation which had been his daily consolation on the highways and the byways of the *parivrâjaka* life in far-off Hindusthan. Gradually he recovered his peace of mind, and arranged his belongings as best as he could.

On the following day he set out to visit the World's Fair. He was struck speechless with amazement at the wonders he saw. Here all the latest products of the inventive and artistic mind of the entire world had been brought to a focus, as it were, for examination and admiration. He had seen nothing of this kind before. He was roused to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. Yes, here was all the glory and the riches of the Western world,—that dim Western world of which he had had only fleeting glimpses while in his own native land. To be sure, he had mastered the thought of the Western world, but he had never fully realised its concrete actualities and its prodigious life and energy till he saw them. He visited the various exhibition palaces, marvelling at the vast machinery and at the arts and products

Koviloor Digital Library

of the land, but above all at the tremendous energy and practical acumen of the human mind as manifested in this Western world. But in the midst of the streams of people on all sides he felt a wave of terrible solitude steal over him, for in all that vast assembly, aye, in the whole continent of North America he had not as much as one friend. He returned to his hotel in the evening quite exhausted.

And yet, casually the Swami became acquainted with people here and there who approached him, desiring to know who he was. He continued to frequent the Fair, absorbing every aspect of learning with which he was brought into contact. The splendour of it all, its hugeness, its perfect organisation, made him wonder. And though he remained in Chicago but twelve days, it might be said that he acquired as much knowledge and general information as an ordinary person would get in twelve years. He was a keen observer; his eyes were eager to take in every object of value in the Exhibition. His mind was always on the alert and in a state of constant scholastic excitement.

While he was on the Fair grounds one day a funny incident occurred, which is best narrated in the Swami's own words. In a letter written shortly after his leaving Chicago he writes:—

"The Rajah of K—— was here and he was being lionised by some portion of Chicago society. I once met the Rajah in the Fair grounds, but he was too big to speak with a poor Fakir. There was an eccentric Mahratta Brâhman selling nail-made pictures in the Fair, dressed in a *dhooti*. This fellow told the reporters all sorts of things against the Rajah,—that he was a man of low caste, that those Rajahs were nothing but slaves, and that they generally led immoral lives, etc., etc. And these truthful (?) editors for which America is famous, wanted to give the boy's stories some weight; and so the next day they wrote huge columns in their papers, giving an elaborate description of 'a man of wisdom', meaning me,—extolling me to the skies, and putting all sorts of words in my mouth, which I never even dreamt of, and ascribing to me all those remarks made by the Mahratta Brâhman about the Rajah of K——! And it was such a good brushing, that Chicago society gave up the Rajah in hot haste.....These newspaper editors made capital out of me to give my countryman a brushing. That shows, however, that in this

Kovilpur Digital Library

country intellect carries more weight than all the pomp of money and title."

Yes,—somehow the reporters had found the Swami out. Certainly such a conspicuous figure as the Swami was not to escape the notice of news-devouring reporters. And so they learned much about him from the manager of the hotel where he was stopping, whilst others sought him out upon the Fair grounds, besieging him with questions and marvelling at his cosmopolitanism and at his high mental calibre. Gradually the Swami became accustomed to his strange surroundings, which interested him. But there were moments when he felt depressed. Those whom he had met were only casual acquaintances. He had made no friendships; but in his heart, beyond both the excitement and the depression of his experiences he somehow felt that he had a call from Above and that the Lord would lead and guide him. After all, there was no doubt as to the rightness of the step that he had taken in leaving India.

But his hopes received a rude shock when, after the first few days in Chicago, he betook himself to the Information Bureau of the Exposition in order to learn details concerning the Parliament. He entered its office with trembling emotion, and made inquiries as to when the great convention was to open; but to his dismay he learned that it would not commence until after the first week of September, and also that no one could be admitted as a delegate unless he had proper references, and finally he was told that the time for adding to the number of delegates had gone by. This broke the Swami's spirit. He had hoped that all would be well. Now he found that he had left India much too early, as it was then only the middle of July; and to have come all the way from India and to wait all that length of time—for nothing! It was too much. The Swami now discovered the actual facts of the situation. He had not been sent by any recognised organisation. He wondered why he had been so foolish as to have listened to those sentimental schoolboys of Madras, who were entirely unaware of the formalities

Koviloor Digital Library

of invitation and election proper necessary to the sending of delegates. "To their unbounded faith it never occurred," writes the Sister Nivedità, "that they (the disciples) were demanding what was, humanly speaking, impossible. They thought that Vivekananda had only to appear and be given his chance. The Swami himself was as simple in the ways of the world as these his disciples, and when he was once sure that he was divinely called to make the attempt, he put no further difficulties in the way. Nothing could have been more typical of the unorganised-ness of Hinduism itself than this going forth of its representative unannounced, and without formal credentials, to enter the strongly guarded doors of the world's wealth and power."

Then, too, his purse was gradually emptying itself. The hotel charges were enormous; he found that in America money was spent "like water"; and then, he had no idea of the value of money, and therefore he was cheated right and left wherever he went. A great depression came over him and he feared that it might come to such a pass that he would have to telegraph to his Madras disciples for more money wherewith either to return to India, or, to keep himself in the country for six months at least, by which time he hoped to find his way into society and make himself heard. At all events, he was determined not to give up easily. Finally, he decided to make every effort to succeed in America, and if he failed, to try in England, and if he failed there too, he could go back to India and wait for further commands from On High. Later, however, a gentleman of Madras wrote to a friend in Chicago about the Swami, and she and her husband were very kind to him. Thus was begun a friendship which lasted as long as the Swami lived. All the members of the family learned to love him darley, to appreciate his brilliant gifts, and to admire the purity and simplicity of his character, to which they often bore willing and loving testimony.

The Swami had heard that Boston was the Athens of America, but he thought, perhaps it was the Benares of

Kevilool Digital Library

America as well. He was also told that it was much less expensive than Chicago. So thinking it advisable he left Chicago for Boston. But who knows how the Lord directs! The Swami, who had been helped in a score of wonderful ways in other days as the *parivrájaka*, was also helped here. Travelling with him in the same carriage was an elderly lady from a village near Boston, who observed him closely and was attracted by his noble personality. She was struck also by the spiritual light on his face. Above all, she was surprised to see that for the whole day they were travelling together, the Swami sat all the while silent and absorbed in his own thoughts, calm and unconcerned with his surroundings. Then, too, she was exceedingly curious. An Oriental! It would be nice to have him live for some time at her house! She thought, "I can invite all my friends and it will be most interesting!" At last, she approached the Swami and entered into conversation with him. She was more than interested to know that he was an Indian monk and had come to America to preach the great truths of the Vedanta. She said, "Well, Swami, I invite you to come to my home and live there. Perhaps something will turn up in your favour!" What was this! In the very depths of anxiety concerning the increasingly depressed state of his finances, it seemed to him as if the Lord Himself had now come to his help. He readily consented, and accordingly found himself lodged in the beautiful house of his hostess, called "Breezy Meadows," in Metcalf, Mass., on the day following his departure from Chicago. The lady was evidently a woman of means. The Swami, however, found much difficulty in adjusting himself to his new environments. He was hooted in the streets on account of his quaint dress; and many of those who came to see him at the invitation of his hostess, plied him with all sorts of queer and annoying questions, thinking him "a pagan." However, he patiently bore with all these trials, knowing that no great things were ever accomplished without great suffering and sacrifice.

Here he met the lady superintendent of the women's

Koviloor Digital Library

prison, who had come to see him at the wish of his hostess. She invited him to see the establishment. The Swami writes thus of his thoughts and impressions to a disciple :—

"They don't call it prison but reformatory here. It is the grandest thing I have seen in America. How the inmates of the prison are benevolently treated ; how they are reformed and sent back as useful members of society ; how grand, how beautiful you must see to believe ! And, oh, my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor and the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. .....They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows showering upon them by a cruel society, and they do not know whence the blow comes. They have forgotten that they too are men. And the result is slavery.....Ah, tyrants, you do not know that the obverse is tyranny and the reverse slavery.....

"A hundred thousand men and women," continues the Swami, "fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the down-trodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising-up—the gospel of equality. No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. The Lord has shown me that religion is not at fault, but it is the Pharisees and Sadducees in Hinduism, hypocrites, who invent all sorts of engines of tyranny in the shape of doctrines of *Pâramârthic* and *Vyavahâric*.....Gird up your loins, my boys. I am called by the Lord for this. I have been dragged through a whole life full of crosses and tortures, I have seen the nearest and the dearest die almost of starvation,—I have been ridiculed, distrusted, and have suffered for my sympathy for the very men who scoff and scorn.....The hope lies in you—in the meek, the lowly, but the faithful.....Feel for the miserable and look up for help —it *shall come*. I have travelled for years with this load in my heart and this idea in my head. I have gone from door to door of the so-called rich and great. With a bleeding heart I have crossed half the world to this strange land, seeking for help. The Lord is great. I know He will help me; I may perish of cold or hunger in this land, but I bequeath to you, young men, this sympathy, this struggle for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed.....Yea, down on your faces before the Lord, and make a great sacrifice, the sacrifice of a whole life for them. Vow then to devote your whole lives to the cause of the redemption of these three hundred millions, going down and down every day.....Glory unto the Lord, we will succeed. Hundreds will fall in the struggle—

Koviloor Digital Library

hundreds will be ready to take it up. Faith—sympathy, fiery faith and fiery sympathy! Life is nothing; death is nothing—hunger nothing, cold nothing. Glory unto the Lord—march on, the Lord is our General. Do not look back to see who falls—forward—onward! Thus and thus we shall go on, brethren. One falls and another takes up the work."

Indeed, the Swami found himself beset with all sorts of difficulties. He had arrived in America at a time when it was difficult to get into intellectual society, as then the scholarly people and persons of position were away from the cities at summer resorts and would come back only in the winter. So there was no other way open to him but to wait. In the meantime he tried his best to find any plank he could float upon. Moreover winter was coming on, and he feared that it would go hard with him, for he had no warm clothing. His quaint dress often caused hundreds of people in the streets to stare at him. His hostess advised him, therefore, to dress himself in the American fashion. But he found that a decent suit would cost him at least one hundred dollars. And if he spent this sum there would be almost nothing left in his possession. Consequently he was very much upset in various ways at the beginning of his sojourn in America. Living in this uncertainty was a great strain upon his system. Many times he did not know where to turn; and yet how sweet, how tender was his faith! He wrote in the same letter as quoted above: "I am here amongst the children of the Son of Mary, and the Lord Jesus will help me." He saw that the more advanced visitors that came to him, liked him for his love for the Prophet of Nazareth and understood the broad views of Hinduism as presented to them by him. Some of those who visited him were influential people and they invited him to speak before a large Lady's Club, that had interested itself in the heroic Ramâbâi. But before this lecture he had to purchase for himself the American citizen's dress, and a long black coat which gave him an ecclesiastical air. He kept his yellow robes and turban for lecturing purposes only. His lecture at the Club was a success, and many persons became interested in him.

Slowly the way was opening up for him. Distinguished

Koviloor Digital Library

persons called on him and amongst them, no less a man than the famous J. H. Wright, Professor of Greek in the Harvard University, with whom he was closeted for four hours, discussing all manner of subjects. The Swami had given up every hope of being present as a speaker in the Parliament of Religions, but how wonderful are the ways of the Lord! Professor Wright became so deeply impressed with his rare ability that he insisted that he should represent Hinduism in his Parliament, and said, "This is the only way by which you can be introduced to the nation at large." The Swami explained his difficulties and said that he had no credentials. Aye, he had no credentials. His Madrassi friends had thought that he would need none. Professor Wright who recognised his genius spoke out, "To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!" He then assured the Swami that he would take it upon himself to see that he should have a place in the Parliament and be admitted as a delegate representing "Hinduism." He was acquainted with numerous persons of position and distinction in connection with the Parliament and wrote at once to his friend, the Chairman of the Committee for selecting delegates, stating that, "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." Knowing that the Swami had not enough money he kindly presented him with a ticket to Chicago, and also gave him letters of introduction to the Committee which had in charge the matters of housing and providing for the Oriental delegates. This was, indeed, a God-send! The Swami rejoiced at seeing this literal manifestation of the Divine Providence. Yes, the purpose for which he had come so many, many miles was about to be fulfilled in an unforeseen way.

Again to Chicago and to the impetuosity of life as it is lived there." But there is a note of tenderness and sadness before the success that is to come, bespeaking well the Swami's spirit of *sannyâs* and the sweet childlike resignation to the will of the Lord. It is often darkest just before the light; and so it was with him. It so happened that on his journey

Kovilpor Digital Library

to Chicago, rejoicing in spirit that at length the Lord had cleared away the obstacles before him and given him the means and ways wherewith to present his message to the peoples to the West, he met with a merchant whose kindness he often spoke of with great feeling, and who promised to to direct him to his proper destination. Both alighted from the train at Chicago, and the merchat had to part with the Swami in great haste. There was no time for formalities. Thus it occurred that he forgot to instruct the Swami how to reach that part of the great city where Dr. Barrows had his office. Though the Swami had received directions from his friend, Prof. Wright on leaving Boston, what was his dismay, however, when he found that he had lost the address! He made inquiries of passers-by, but it being the north-east side of the city where mostly Germans lived, they did not understand his words. Indeed, mistaking him for a negro they treated him with scant respect. Night was coming on. He could not even make any one understand that he wanted to learn at least the whereabouts of a hotel. He felt himself amongst strangers and knew not what to do. At length, despairingly he laid himself down to sleep into a huge empty box in the freight-yards of the railway, and trusting to the guidance of the Lord he freed himself of all anxieties. On the morrow he was to shake America with his address at the Parliament; but now, so destiny decided, he should lie like some outcast, unknown, unaided and despised,—or perhaps, more truly speaking, like some *sannyâsin* in his own dear land, sleeping where the evening found him. Morning came; he arose and "smelling fresh water", as he said, he went in that direction to find himself in a short time walking on the most fashionable residential drive in the metropolis, the Lake Shore Drive, where millionaires and merchant-princes dwell in palaces which even kings would envy. He was extremely hungry but like the true *sannyâsin* as he was, he commenced begging from house to house, asking for food and to be directed to the quarters of the Parliament Committee. But for his soiled clothes and travel-worn appearance he was rudely

Koviloor Digital Library

dismissed from some of the houses. At others, he was insulted by the servants. At still others, the door was slammed in his face. His heart sank; he knew nothing of city directories or telephones, so could not seek rescue in that way. On and on he went. At length exhausted he sat himself quietly upon the roadside, determined to abide by the Will of the Most High. At this juncture, he saw the door of a fasionable residence opposite to him open and queen-like, a lady descend from the entrance to the street. Approaching the Swami she accosted him in a soft voice, speaking with accents of culture and refinement, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions ?" The Swami then told her of his lost address and his difficulties. Immediately she asked him to come into her house and gave orders to her servants that he should be taken to a room and attended to in every way. She promised the Swami that after he had felt refreshed and had his breakfast she herseif would accompany him to the offices of the Parliament of Religions. The Swami was grateful beyond words; He was amarzed at this probable working of Providence. He thought, "What a romantic deliverance? How strange the ways of the Lord!" And as the child in spirit which he was, he followed the good advice which the motherly lady offered him. The lady was Mrs. George W. Hale, with whose husband and children he became the greatest friend.

A new spirit took possession of him. He now knew that certainly the Lord was with him, and with the great spirit of a prophet he awaited the coming of events. With Mrs. Hale he called on the officers of the Parliament, gave his credentials, was gladly accepted as a delegate and found himself lodged with the other Oriental delegates to the Parliament. He felt with the passing of each moment that the Parliament of Religions would be the great test, the crucial experience for him. The day glided by in prayer, in meditation and in earnest longing that he might be made the true instrument of the Lord, the true spokesman of Hinduism, the true bearer of his Master's Message. He made acquaintance with

Kovilloor Digital Library

many distinguished personages who were to attend the Parliament. In the grand circle of ecclesiastics that came and went in and about Chicago he moved as one lost in rapture and in prayer, hoping, praying, trusting. He had no personal feelings in the matter, save as these had relation with the carrying out of the Mission entrusted to him by his Master and perceived by him as *Adesh* from On High.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXVIII

THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS.

The World's Parliament of Religions, which was held in the City of Chicago in September 1893, was undoubtedly one of the greatest events in the history of the world ; certainly it marked an era in the history of religions, and especially in that of Hinduism. The culture, the aspiration and the enlightenment of humanity were represented there in their synthetic entirety. Its full significance can be cognised only with the lapse of much longer time. From all parts of the earth delegates came, representing each and every form of organised religious belief. It was not only a Parliament of Religions ; it was a parliament of humanity. If it had done nothing else than to make the whole body of human society aware by contrast of its "Unity in Diversity" and "Diversity in Unity" of the religious outlook, it would still have been unequalled among the world's conventions in character and in importance. It consolidated the religious vision of humanity ; and this was the motive amongst those more unprejudiced workers who made possible this ensemble of religious ideas and creeds. But it did far more than that. It roused a wave of new thought over the Western world. It contrasted the West with the East, and the East with the West. In the language of the Hon'ble Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell, President of the Scientific Section of the Parliament of Religions :—

"One of its chief advantages has been in the great lesson which it has taught the Christian World, especially to the people of the United States, namely, that there are other religions more venerable than Christianity, which surpass it in philosophical depth, in spiritual intensity, in independent vigour of thought, and in breadth and sincerity of human sympathy, while not yielding to it a single hair's breadth in ethical beauty and efficiency. Eight great non-Christian religious groups were represented in its deliberations—Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Mohammedanism and Mazdaism."

Kovilôor Digital Library

Some of the highest ecclesiastical dignitaries in America had preached the necessity and the advantages of such a parliament from some time. Therefore, when the Chicago World's Fair was organised it occurred to the leading lights of the Christian Church, particularly to those of Roman Catholicism, that the Fair would be the proper medium and opportunity for the holding of such a convention ; and the signs of the times pointed to its sure success. Some of the organisers of the Parliament might have been prompted by selfish and sectarian motives to advance the interests of particular churches and glorify their superiority over others, but the majority were actuated by a serious intellectual and spiritual intent. News of the fact that the Parliament was to be held was heralded broadcast to all parts of the globe. Committees of various characters were formed to organise it on a proper basis, and invitations were sent out to the heads or to the executive bodies of all acknowledged religious organisations the world over. Stipulations were made and instructions given ; and the process of sending delegates mapped out. Each religious creed was to send its own delegate or delegates as the case might be, and reception committees were to receive them on their arrival in Chicago. There were many necessary formalities to be gone through in order to systematise the great amount of transaction. Unfortunately, the group of disciples who had sent the Swami as a representative of Hinduism to the Parliament were unaware of these. They had simply seen the worth of the man and his ideas ; and they had felt sure that he could introduce himself ; and so, in one sense, he did.

If one can imagine what the Parliament of Religions was in all the splendour of actuality, he would see a grand concourse of some of the most distinguished personages of the world. Not alone that, he would see a great mass of humanity, to the number varying from seven to ten thousand, marching in almost military order to the seats and joining the sessions of the Parliament. A Cardinal and many Archbishops and Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church and

Koviloor Digital Library

many learned and well-known theologians and divines of all the diverse sects of Christianity were present. Many of the greatest philosophers of the world were in daily attendance. It had taken years to gather this large assembly. It was not only Christianity, the religion of the West, which was represented, but the great religious systems of the Orient as well. More than one thousand papers were read by the different delegates. This gives some impression of the vastness of the undertaking and also of its vast importance. In connection with the Parliament, there were sections, one being the Scientific Section, mentioned in particular because the Swami spoke several times before it. The Hon'ble Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell who presided over it, became a great friend of the Swami and an ardent advocate of Hinduism, having readily penetrated into its inherent worth mainly through the latter's lucid interpretation of it.

A noted American writer, speaking of the Parliament of Religions and of the Swami Vivekananda, says :—

"Prior to the Convention of the Parliament of Religions, adjunct to the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, which was convened in Chicago, little was known of Vivekananda in this country. On that auspicious occasion, however, he appeared in all his magnificent grandeur. It was on Monday, September 11th, at 10 o'clock A.M., when the opening address was delivered at the Art Institute, Chicago, by Dr. Barrows, from whence the following few words,—'Since faith in a Divine Power to whom men believe they owe service and worship has been like the sun, a life-giving and fructifying potency in man's intellectual and moral development ; since religion lies back of Hindu literature with its marvellous and mystic developments of European arts, it did not appear that religion any more than education, art, or electricity should be excluded from the Columbian Exposition.'

" On that memorable Monday morning there sat upon the platform of the great Hall of Columbus representatives of the religious hopes and beliefs of twelve hundred millions of the human race. It was indeed impressive. In the centre sat Cardinal Gibbons, highest prelate of the Roman Catholic Church on the Western Continent. He was seated upon a Chair of State and opened the meeting with prayer. On the right and left of him were gathered the Oriental delegates, whose brilliant attire vied with his own scarlet robes in brilliancy. Conspicuous among the followers of Brahma, Buddha and Mohammed was an

Koviloor Digital Library

eloquent monk from India, Vivekananda by name. He was clad in gorgeous red apparel and wore a large yellow turban, his remarkably fine features and bronze complexion standing out prominently in the great throng. Beside him sat Nagarkar of the Brahmo Samaj, representative of the Hindu Theists; next was Dharmapala, Ceylon's Buddhist representative; next came Mazoomdar, leader of the Theists in India. Amongst the world's choicest divines these and many more, whose names would be more or less familiar, must be left out for want of space. This will suffice to show the setting with which our subject was surrounded. 'In contact with the learned minds of India we have inspired a new reverence for the Orient.' In numerical order Vivekananda's position was number thirty-one."

The Swami himself describes to a disciple the opening of the Parliament and his own state of mind in replying to the address of welcome offered to the delegates, in the following words :—

"On the morning of the opening of the Parliament, we all assembled in a building called the Art Palace, where one huge and other smaller temporary halls were erected for the sittings of the Parliament. Men from all nations were there. From India were Mazoomdar of the Brahmo Samaj and Nagarkar of Bombay, Mr. Gandhi representing the Jains, and Mr. Chakravarti representing Theosophy with Mrs. Annie Besant. Of these men, Mazoomdar and I were of course old friends, and Chakravarti knew me by name. There was a grand procession, and we were all marshalled on to the platform. Imagine a hall below and a huge gallery above, packed with six or seven thousand men and women representing the best culture of the country, and on the platform learned men of all the nations on the earth. And I who never spoke in public in my life, to address this august assemblage!! It was opened in great form with music and ceremony and speeches ; then the delegates were introduced one by one, and they stepped up and spoke ! Of course my heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up ; I was so nervous, and could not venture to speak in the morning. Mazoomdar made a nice speech—Chakravarti a nicer one, and they were much applauded. They were all prepared and came with ready-made speeches. I was a fool and had none, but bowed down to Devi Saraswati and stepped up, and Dr. Barrows introduced me. I made a short speech.....and when it was finished, I sat down almost exhausted with emotion."

Indeed, to face that sea of faces would have given even a finished orator something of a stage-fright. To speak before such a distinguished, critical and highly intellectual audience

Koviloor Digital Library

required intense self-confidence and a certain amount of personal daring. The Swami had seen the imposing procession, the huge assembly, the keen, eager faces of the masses, the shrewd, authoritative and dignified countenances of the Princes of the Christian churches, who sat on the platform. He was as if lost in amazement by the splendour of it all. What had he, the unsophisticated *parivrâjaka*, the simple Indian Sâdhu in common with this grand function and these high functionaries? Aye, he had much to do with them, as was shortly to be seen. His very person had attracted the attention of thousands. Amongst Archbishops, Bishops, Priests and Theologians, the many singled him out both by reason of his apparel and his commanding presence. He himself was alternately wrapt in silent prayer and stirred by the eloquence of those speakers who had preceded him. Several times he had been called upon to speak but he had said, "No, not now," until the Chairman was puzzled and wondered if he would speak at all. At length, in the late afternoon when the Chairman insisted, the Swami arose, seeing that he could no longer defer to speak.

The shock steadied his nerves and he seemed of a sudden to have touched the well-springs of illumination. His face glowed like fire. His eyes surveyed in a sweep the huge assembly before him. The whole audience grew intent; a pin could have been heard to fall on the pavement. Then shone forth the *Nara* in the Swami, the radiance of a *Saptarshi*, the Power of a Child of the Rishis and the whole Realisation of the Man who had seen God in Dakshineswar. He was filled with the ideas and spirit of the Vedanta, and breathing a short prayer to Devi Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, he addressed his audience as, "Sisters and Brothers of America." And with that, before he had uttered another word, the whole Parliament was as if taken by a great storm of enthusiasm. A thrill passed through the whole assembly. Hundreds upon hundreds rose to their feet, and sent up deafening notes of applause over and over again. The Parliament had gone mad; everyone was

Koviloor Digital Library

cheering, cheering, cheering! The Swami was bewildered. What did this mean! Then he knew that the Mother was behind him. For full two minutes he attempted to speak, but the wild enthusiasm of the great masses prevented him. He had called them, "Sisters and Brothers." The others had addressed them in formal and conventional ways. But here was an Oriental monk, imbued with the thought that the whole world was his family, and that all persons were his brothers and his sisters. Here was a soul, greeting thousands of other souls by the sweet and loving terms, "Sisters and Brothers." "Not one of our own people had thought of that!" they said. Was it this, or was it his luminous personality, or was it the Divine Power behind him that had seized the audience by a whirlwind of spiritual ecstasy—for it was nothing short of ecstasy!

When silence was restored the Swami began his address by thanking the youngest of nations in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world, the Vedic Order of Sannyâsins, and introducing Hinduism as "the Mother of religions, a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance." And he quoted two beautiful, illustrative passages in this relation, taken from the Scriptures of Hinduism: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!" And the other: "Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me!"

It was only a short speech which the Swami made when he spoke for the first time in that august convention; but its spirit of eclecticism, its sense of universality, its fundamental earnestness and broad-mindedness completely captured the whole assembly, aye, the whole nation. No other speaker had uttered such a synthesis before, voicing forth the spirit of the Parliament. Each had spoken from his sectarian viewpoint, but the Swami announced the universality of religious truths

Kovilour Digital Library

and the sameness of the Goal of all religious realisations And that he did so, was because he had sat at the Feet of a Man of Realisation, long ago in far-off Dakshineswar, and had learned from his Master, through actual contact and personal test, the truth that all religions were one, that they were all paths leading to the self-same Goal, the self-same God.

When the Swami sat down "exhausted with emotion," the Parliament gave him a grand ovation, which was a mark of their significant approval of his right as a Preacher and a Prophet. An apocalyptic atmosphere hung over the great gathering. The opening of the Parliament had been consecrated by prayer in a state of recollection, when the thousands bowed down before the Supreme and their thoughts arose like incense unto the Most High. But when the Swami spoke, an entirely different order of emotion was at play. It was no longer the atmosphere of prayer, but the atmosphere of illumination, of union of all souls in the vision of the Oneness of all souls. The Swami's speech, though short, rang with the note of religious harmony ; it was full of fire. It was not a tame response to welcome, but an overwhelming message of true well-wishing, of deep benediction, and of brotherly love.

With the exception of a short address on "Why We Disagree," in which he pointed out that the insularity of religious outlook was the source of fanaticism, by referring to the story of the frog in the well that made the well his universe, the Swami did not speak before the Parliament proper until the nineteenth of September when he read his celebrated "Paper on Hinduism." This was a summary of the philosophy, psychology, and general ideas and statements of Hinduism, in its all-inclusive aspects. Though the Swami was not the only Indian or even the only Bengali present, he was the only representative of Hinduism proper. There were other Hindu delegates, who stood for societies, or churches or sects, but the Swami stood for Hinduism in its universal aspects which is the meeting-ground of all the sects of India. He gave forth the ideas

Koviloor Digital Library

of the Hindus concerning the soul and its destiny; he expounded the doctrines of the Vedanta philosophy, which harmonises all religious ideas and all forms of worship, viewing them as various presentations of truth and as various paths of realisation thereunto. He preached the religious philosophy of Hinduism, which declares the soul to be eternally pure, eternally free, vested in Divinity, one in all beings throughout the universe, only *appearing* as limited and manifold under the bondage of matter. He spoke of the attainment of the Goal, the perception of Oneness, as the result of innumerable efforts in the purification of consciousness, a task that necessitated the living of repeated lives. He asserted that the soul was never created, and thereby disposed of the idea of a Creator, which "does not explain the anomaly" one finds everywhere, that one is created happy and another miserable, "but simply expresses the cruel fiat of an all-powerful being." And he went on to say that, death means only a change of centre from one body to another and that one's present is determined by one's past action and the future by the present! He said that in order to realise Divinity, the self which says "I and mine" must vanish, but this did not mean the denial but the utmost fulfilment of true Individuality. By overcoming the small egoistical self, centred in selfishness, one attains to infinite, universal individuality. "Then alone," he said, "can death cease when I am one with life; then alone can misery cease when I am one with happiness itself; then alone can all errors cease when I am one with knowledge itself; and this is the necessary scientific conclusion. Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter, and Advaitam (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, the Soul." The overwhelming spirit of his address was the sense of Oneness. The Swami did not try to account for the fact why the Perfect seemed to become the imperfect. He said with all the integrity of a Hindu

Kovilpur Digital Library

philosopher, "But the Hindu is sincere. He does not want to take shelter under sophistry. He is brave enough to face the question in a manly fashion; and his answer is 'I do not know!'.....The Hindu does not attempt to explain *why* one is, *why* one is the body. The answer that it is the will of God, is no explanation." And yet the "I do not know" was not altogether an agnostic statement, for he emphasised the fact that as a man evolves that which is imperfect and impure falls away from him and that by the removal of the veils of ignorance, absolute knowledge, or the Divine Consciousness, is made manifest. How the veils of ignorance had been superimposed, he did not know, nor was he concerned to know; but that they could be removed and that in this overcoming of ignorance by Realisation the Goal was to be attained, he did know. And he insisted that the realisation of the Oneness of the Self, aye, the very becoming and being of Divinity, inevitably leads to the seeing of the Divinity manifest everywhere.

And inspired with this vision like another Vedic Sage he addressed the vast mass of humanity before him as "heirs of Immortal bliss" and exclaimed with apostolic power, "Yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners! Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners? It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, oh lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter." "Thus it is," he continued, "that the Vedas proclaim not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws, not an endless prison of cause and effect, but that at the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One, 'By whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain and death stalks upon the earth. And what is His nature? He is everywhere, the Pure and Formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful," and "Knowing Him

Kavikoor Digital Library

alone you shall be saved from death over again" and attain Immortality. The Swami's spirit was that the Lord was the Reality of all appearance, the very Self of the self in each and all, that He was both Personal and Impersonal. The heart should go out to Him in absolute, pure, unselfish love, love for love's sake, which knows no bargaining, no praying for anything. And this Infinite Love and Infinite Knowledge are one and the same, and Love which presupposes duality, becoming intermingled with Knowledge in Oneness, constitutes *Mukti*—freedom.

But what of the polytheism in Hinduism? The Swami emphatically denied at the very outset that there was polytheism or idolatry in India. He explained the psychological necessity of lower forms of religious ideas and worship, of prayers and ceremonies as aids to the purification of mind, and of image worship as a help to spiritual concentration. "The Hindus," he pointed out, "have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence and such other ideas with different images and forms." It was not the idol which was real, but the representation of Divinity in the devotee's inner order of spiritual vision, of which the image was but the means for objectification. And he asserted that with the Hindus, moveover, religion is not centred in doctrinal assent or dissent, but in REALISATION, and that in this light, forms and symbols and ceremonials are only the supports, the helps of spiritual childhood, which the Hindu gradually transcends as he progresses towards spiritual manhood ; and also that even these helps are not necessary for every one or compulsory in Hinduism. He saw "Unity in variety" in religion, and said, "Contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures." "It is," he continued, "the same light coming through glasses of different colours. And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns." And therefore in the concluding part of his speech he held out the idea of a universal religion, having no temporary,

Koviloor Digital Library

spatial or sectarian bounds, but including every attitude of the human mind, from that of the savage to the most enlightened, in a grand synthesis, helping each to develop in his own line towards the Goal. And toleration, catholicity, universal acceptance, evolution of the divine nature of man through the processes of purification, and final insight,—these were to be the sole aim, the one motto, the one, unifying spirit of the aspirant after Truth. The Swami closed his address with the following noteworthy words :—

"Offer such a religion and all the nations will follow you. Asoka's council was a council of the Buddhist faith. Akbar's, though more to the purpose, was only a parlour-meeting. It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion.

"May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea. The star arose in the East ; it travelled steadily towards the West, sometimes dimmed and sometimes effulgent, till it made a circuit of the world, and now it is again rising on the very horizon of the East, the borders of the Sanpo, a thousandfold more effulgent than it ever was before.

"Hail Columbia, motherland of liberty ! It has been given to thee, who never dipped her hand in her neighbour's blood, who never found out that the shortest way of becoming rich was by robbing one's neighbours, it has been given to thee to march at the vanguard of civilisation with the flag of harmony."

Certainly it is not going beyond the bounds of just criticism to style the Swami's "Paper on Hinduism" as the most unique and prophetic utterance in the history of religions, holding out, as it does, the beatific perception of Oneness, of Realisation and of the Divinity of Man. Naturally its effect on the Parliament was dazzling. It cleared the theological atmosphere of the Western mind, as collectively made manifest by that great assembly, and invigorated it with a new life. It sounded the trumpet of glad tidings by its full words of hope, of cheer, of salvation for all, and a wave of new thought swept over the Western world. Its thundering declarations of all-inclusive ideals, upset religious bigotry and sectarianism, which

Koviloor Digital Library

have drenched the earth often and often with human blood and retarded progress and civilisation in the name of religion. The Swami's definition of a universal religion, so startling in its novelty, struck at the very root of all sectarian thought, and he spoke with *authority*. He was a Man of Realisation. Through him the whole burden and effulgence of the Divine Consciousness bore in upon the Parliament, and thousands of those who were brought up in special religious beliefs, saw on that day the Universality of Truth and the Oneness of all Religious Realisation.

And as to the Swami himself, undoubtedly in that hour he attained the very climax of his illustrious career, preaching, through the Parliament, to all the peoples of the earth the Sovereignty of Human Nature, Its Divinity, and Its Unity. And in that hour he was acclaimed by that vast representative assembly of nations as a Man with a Message, as an Apostle of a New Order of Religious Thought. In that hour the Swami Vivekananda became a world-wide and an historic figure, his name ever to remain associated with the preaching of the Gospel of the Divinity of Man.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXIX

THE IMPORT OF THE SWAMI'S ADDRESS.

It may be stated without reservation that the Swami's address at the Parliament of Religions constituted one of the most remarkable human documents in the history of religious, philosophical and spiritual ideas. It was organic, fundamental, unequivocal, realistic and idealistic in one, and fraught with tremendous significance. It was a document expressing a religious synthesis previously unheard of in the continent of America. It postulated the organic oneness of the religious impulse, the unity amidst the diversity of religious ideas, the sameness of the religious perception of man, the interrelatedness of all religious life, and of all efforts at spiritual vision. The unique feature of its contents was its universal toleration and its sense and spirit of religious co-operation. It had no note of criticism, no note of antagonism ; its spirit was throughout eclectic, synthetic. Its one dogma was the Divinity of Man. Confessedly, this dogma went beyond the theological short-sightedness of many of the creeds present that held the idea of the doctrine of original sin. But the Swami did not attack any of them ; he simply widened the perspective of their vision, and for one solemn hour that throbbed with spiritual insight, the clericals at the Parliament were carried away by the force of his statements. The Swami had not been metaphysical ; he certainly had not been doctrinal. He had thrust no opinions forward with intellectual violence. He had preached, in all the solemnity of immediate vision, his own realisation of the mystical spirit in the religious life, as opposed to blind credulity which most creeds uncompromisingly demand. The Swami's address was replete with a spiritual psychology, in which belief could no longer remain secure in a mere intellectual assent ; it was to become throbbing, merging

Koviloor Digital Library

itself in consciousness as realisation and a literal awareness. The believer must become the perceiver, the Seer; the Seer must become the Saint.

Though the spirit that breathed in the Swami's address was the Vedic Consciousness of ancient India, it was nevertheless radically suited to the modern Western mind as represented in the Parliament. It postulated not only the realisation of God, but the realisation of the soul as one with God, there being but One Nature that is Infinite. It was redundant with vitality, emphasizing strength and potentiality and the richness of content that characterise the succeeding stages of development of the spiritual effort. Through duality, through multiplicity, the path must reach to Oneness. Soaring higher and higher the spiritual eagle attains the Sun. The Ray is drawn inward; in essence it becomes the Sun.

The Swami brought to light new ideas to the American mind concerning the soul which, on the path to full Self-revelation, passes through succeeding embodiments, constantly making and reaping experience that weaves itself into discrimination as to the essential qualities and nature of Pure Spirit. Passing through many modifications of consciousness, both objective and subjective, the soul finally attains to a Consciousness of its real Essence, the goal where the plurality of selves merges in Singleness and True Individuality. As to the theory of Creation, the Swami broke down the average theological conception, by stating that Creation was without beginning and without end, that the sum total of cosmic energy was ever the same, and that the Creator and Creation were like two lines running parallel to each other without beginning and without end. The Swami further stated that heredity was one's own mental past, having nothing to do with the body and its tendencies which were only the physical configurations thereof, and that the reminiscence of one's past life was a possibility, for "the very depths of the ocean of memory can be stirred." He said that habits were not to be accounted for by physical but by psychological causes, "brought over as effects from the past," and added that they could be overcome by the

Koviloor Digital Library

force of human will, as what man has done man can undo. His theory of reincarnation, making personal effort for perfection the only method of salvation, naturally tossed overboard the conventional understanding of the idea of Redemption. It assuredly upset the conventional and unreflectingly accepted theology of "Eternal Damnation" of the soul in hell, and that of "Eternal Heaven", for, as he said, a limited cause could not produce an unlimited effect.

It is apparent that the ideas which the Swami announced created a momentous impression on account of their novelty and on account of their far-reaching inclusiveness, and that they were bound to be extensive in thier effect. In studying the full import of the Swami's address and the drift of its ideas, one's conception of the whole psychology of religion is reorganised. Perhaps it would be without the pale of true biographical statement to say that he had originated the New Theology prevalent in all the sects of Christendom, but certainly the spirit of the Parliament did, and if the Swami's celebrated address is to be reckoned, as it was by the leading American newspapers and magazines, as the most synthetic and all-inclusive utterance voicing the true spirit of the Parliament, then indirectly *he was the Spirit of the New Theology in the West*, even though others might have organised that spirit into the numerous forms of the spiritual vision and the theological outlook of the present day. Certainly, that the doctrines of reincarnation and the Divinity of Man are being preached under the very shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and in the pulpits of some of the most famous churches in America, is to be accredited to the Swami. And in this sense he made Christianity itself restate its contents ; and the work that has begun continues, assuming large proportions, so that now no longer does the old-fashioned type of revivalist with his furious declamation, concerning the "Eternal fires", sending large audiences into hysterics, command an intellectual and enlightened hearing. Of course, there were other addresses that the Swami gave beside his "Paper on Hinduism" that influenced large audiences and

Koviloor Digital Library

made thousands of persons accept his ideas fervently. And it must particularly be held in mind that the special feature of his addresses was in the living power of his utterance and statement and in the luminosity of the Spirit that radiated from his personality.

But above all, the greatest service that the Swami did by his address was to India itself. He ushered Hinduism as a world-religion in the Parliament. He impressed upon the Western world the *universality* of the Hindu Faith and the inestimable richness of its contents. He gave definite historic form to Hinduism before the peoples of the West. He elevated the Hindu Synthesis, making of what had been hitherto regarded as various widely diverging sects, a Mother Church; he made Hinduism the name for the whole spiritual outlook of the human soul, instead of a group of sects. He placed all the sects of the Mother-Church on an equal footing, as so many side-chapels in the great Cathedral of Hinduism. He presented the philosophical synthesis of the Sanatana Dharma, instead of laying emphasis on any one or several of its philosophical aspects, in an insulated manner. He gave an authoritative utterance to the Hindu Faith voicing its communal consciousness, speaking of the inherent unity and harmony running through its numerous creeds. In short, he preached Hinduism, as it is, *per se*, in its entirety.

Some have criticised the Swami for not having preached the special forms and aspects of Hinduism, such as the idea of Kali or Shiva, or that of the Krishna cult, but he had not set himself to that task. The Swami's mission was to preach the eternal principles of the philosophy and religion of Hinduism, as a whole, and anyone carefully studying the ideas he gave forth would find their relatedness to the various creeds in Hinduism. Then, too, he knew that it would be difficult for the Western mind to comprehend the special thought-forms and thought-symbols conceived by the Indian mind as means of religious practice and spiritual vision. Besides, it must be borne in mind that his intention was not to stand for a sectarian faith, or to proselytise the men of other faiths to his

Koviloor Digital Library

own, but to create a spirit of co-operation and harmony among the religions of the earth. His very last words at the final session of the Parliament were : "Help and not fight !" "Assimilation and not destruction !" "Harmony and peace and not dissension ! "

The Swami certainly conferred a great dignity upon the Hindu outlook on life by revealing in his address a wonderful perception of the unity of the Indian religious ideals, a unity that had not yet been self-consciously expressed in the communal consciousness of Hinduism,—the development of which in this respect, he preached later as a crying need if India should arise. Definitely stated, the principal contribution to Hinduism that the Swami's address embodied was, first, the philosophical and religious synthesis of the Faith of his forefathers ; secondly, the idea of the Mother-Church, embracing all the forms, from the lowest to the highest of its religious vision ; and third though not the last, the immovable position that he accorded to Hinduism by his scholarly and spiritual interpretation of its contents, giving it prestige amongst the enlightened thinkers and theologians of the West, and raising it in the estimation of the whole Western world. And the most eloquent elements in all these triumphs were his commanding personality, his supreme personal realisation and the unimpeachable authority of his statements.

The Sister Nivedità, the learned author of the Introduction to the *Mayavati Memorial Edition* of *The Complete Works of The Swami Vivekananda*, has perhaps best described the general import of his address at the Parliament, saying with great insight :—

"Of the Swami's address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was of 'the religious ideas of the Hindus,' but when he ended, Hinduism had been created. The moment was ripe with this potentiality. The vast audience that faced him represented exclusively the occidental mind, but included some development of all that in this was most distinctive. Every nation in Europe has poured in its human contribution upon America, and notably upon Chicago, where the Parliament was held. Much of the best, as well as some of the worst, of modern effort and struggle, is at all times to be

Kavilpor Digital Library

met with, within the frontiers of that Western Civic Queen, whose feet are upon the shores of Lake Michigan, as she sits and broods, with the light of the North in her eyes. There is very little in the modern consciousness, very little inherited from the past of Europe, that does not hold some outpost in the city of Chicago. And while the teeming life and eager interests of that centre may seem to some of us for the present largely a chaos, yet they are undoubtedly making for the revealing of some noble and slow-wrought ideal of human unity, when the days of their ripening shall be fully accomplished.

"Such was the psychological area, such the sea of mind, young, tumultuous, overflowing with its own energy and self-assurance, yet inquisitive and alert withal, which confronted Vivekananda when he rose to speak. Behind him, on the contrary, lay an ocean, calm with long ages of spiritual development. Behind him lay a world that dated itself from the Vedas, and remembered itself in the Upanishads, a world to which Buddhism was almost modern ; a world that was filled with religious systems of faiths and creeds ; a quiet land, steeped in the sunlight of the tropics, the dust of whose roads had been trodden of the feet of the saints for ages upon ages. Behind him, in short, lay India, with her thousands of years of national development, in which she had sounded many things, proved many things, and realised almost all, save only her own perfect unanimity, from end to end of her great expanse of time and space, as to certain fundamental and essential truths, held by all her people in common.

"These, then, were the two mind-floods, two immense rivers of thought as it were, Eastern and modern, of which the yellow-clad wanderer on the platform of the Parliament of Religions formed for a moment the point of confluence. The formulation of the Common Bases of Hinduism was the inevitable result of the shock of their contact, in a personality, so impersonal. For it was no experience of his own that rose to the lips of the Swami Vivekananda there. He did not even take advantage of the occasion, to tell the story of his Master. Instead of either of these, it was the religious consciousness of India that spoke through him, the message of his whole people, as determined by their whole past. And as he spoke, in the youth and noonday of the West, a nation, sleeping in the shadows of the darkened half of earth, on the far side of the Pacific, waited in spirit for the words that would be borne on the dawn that was travelling towards them, to reveal to them the secret of their own greatness and strength.

"Others stood beside the Swami Vivekananda, on the same platform as he, as apostles of particular creeds and churches. But it was his glory that he came to preach a religion to which each of these was, in his own words, 'Only a travelling, a coming up, of different men

and women, through various conditions and circumstances to the same goal.' He stood there, as he declared, to tell of One who had said of them all, not that one or another was true, in this or that respect, or for this or that reason, but that 'ALL these are threaded upon Me, as pearls upon a string. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power, raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.' To the Hindu, says Vivekananda, 'Man is not travelling from error to truth, but climbing up from truth to truth, from truth that is lower to truth that is higher.' This, and the teaching of *Mukti*,—the doctrine that 'Man is to become divine by realising the divine,' that religion is perfected in us only when it has led us to 'Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world, that One who is the only soul, of which all souls are but delusive manifestations'—may be taken as the two great outstanding truths which, authenticated by the longest and most complex experience in human history, India proclaimed through him to the modern world of the West.

"For India herself, the short address forms, as has been said, a brief Charter of Enfranchisement. Hinduism in its wholeness, the speaker bases on the Vedas, but he spiritualises our conception of the word, even while he utters it. To him, all that, is true is Veda. 'By the Vedas,' he says, 'no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times.' Incidentally, he discloses his conception of the *Sanâtana Dharma*. 'From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the lowest ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jainas, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.' To his mind, there could be no sect, no school, no sincere religious experience of the Indian people—however like an aberration it might seem to the individual—that might rightly be excluded from the embrace of Hinduism. And of this Indian Mother-Church, according to him, the distinctive doctrine is that of the *Ishta Devatâ*, the right of each soul to choose its own path, and to seek God in its own way. No army, then, carries the banner of so wide an Empire as that of Hinduism, thus defined. For as her spiritual goal is the finding of God, even so is her spiritual rule the perfect freedom of every soul to be itself.

"Yet would not this inclusion of all, this freedom of each, be the glory of Hinduism that it is, were it not for her supreme call, of sweetest promise, 'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that dwell in higher spheres! For I have found that Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion. And knowing Him, ye also shall be saved from

Koviloor Digital Library

death.' Here is the word for the sake of which all the rest exists and has existed. Here is the crowning realisation, into which all others are resolvable."

There were still other addresses, besides this one of momentous import, which the Swami gave before the Parliament, or before the conferences in the Scientific Section thereof. Following his "Paper on Hinduism" the Swami spoke on "Religion not the crying need of India," in which he commented on the fact that it was not religion of which the Indians stood in need, but bread. It was but a short address, but therein one finds embodied his solution of India's burning problems. He stated also, that what had brought him to the far West was to seek aid for his impoverished people. By his words the Parliament was made aware that the man who stood before it was not only a priest but a patriot as well. The addresses of the Swami before the Scientific Section were with reference to conferences on Orthodox Hinduism and the Vedanta philosophy and to those on the Modern Religions of India. The first occasion on which he spoke in these conferences, as recorded in the Rev. J. H. Barrow's book on The World's Parliament of Religions, was at the one held on the morning of the twenty-second of September, to discuss Orthodox Hinduism and the Vedanta Philosophy. Whilst that same afternoon the Swami again spoke on the Modern Religions of India. Another conference was held on the twenty-third on the subject of the foregoing addresses. On the twenty-fifth the Swami spoke in the afternoon session, the subject of the address being, "The Essence of the Hindu Religion." The reader might be informed here that four other addresses in these conferences were given by the Swami.

On the twenty-sixth the Swami delivered before the Parliament of Religions a short address called, "Buddhism, the fulfilment of Hinduism." This lecture was marvellous for its clearness of statement, and for its unifying character, of the two great religions. He pointed out that Hinduism was divided, as it were, into two branches, the one being the

Koviloor Digital Library

ceremonial, and the other the purely spiritual. Buddha interpreted the spiritual elements of the Dharma, with their natural social conclusions, to the people. He was the first Teacher in the world to carry on missionary work and to conceive the idea of proselytising. "Shakya Muni," said the Swami, "came not to destroy, but he was the fulfilment, the logical conclusion, the logical development of the religion of the Hindus. Eventually he said that "Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism nor Buddhism without Hinduism," and that the need in India to-day was to "join the wonderful intellect of the Brâhmana with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful humanising power of the Great Master."

The international aspect of the Parliament of Religions took seventeen days of paper-reading, and more than a thousand papers were read before it. The Swami had a good long time given to him over the ordinary half-hour, and being a popular speaker was always put down last to hold the audience. The people would sit from ten in the morning to ten at night, with only a recess of half-an-hour for luncheon, and paper after paper read, most of them uninteresting to them but they would wait and wait to hear their favourite. Such was their enthusiasm !

On the twenty-seventh the Swami delivered his "Address at the Final Session" and here he again rises to one of his happiest and most luminous moods by declaring,—

"The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to the law of growth."

"If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this : It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of his resistance, 'Help and Not Fight,' 'Assimilation and Not Destruction,' 'Harmony and Peace and Not Dissension'."

Koviloor Digital Library

Such were the crowning thoughts of the Swami's Message at the Parliament, a wonderful, all-inclusive Message. Verily, he was the first Oriental since the time of Christ who came from the East as a *Teacher* to the peoples of the West. His spirit has embodied itself everlastingly in connection with the essential elements of religious progress in the West. Through the Parliament he has spoken unto the Occidental nations giving them the broad principles of insight wherewith spiritual to construct the Religion of the Future. Never before had India ever voiced its communal consciousness to the West as it has done through him. True, Buddhism had sent numerous missionaries to the Western world, but the Swami was more than a missionary. The whole religious perception of the race had found expression through him at the Parliament, and the world saw and heard one who was more than a missionary of Hinduism, who was even more than a prophet of Hinduism, aye, who was India itself with its inmost soul incarnate.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXX

AFTER THE PARLIAMENT.

Verily at the Parliament of Religions the Swami Vivekananda had emerged from an unknown monk into a World-Figure, whose name was heralded broadcast. The *Parivrâjaka* of the days of solitude in India had become the Prophet in the very limelight of the world's recognition. On all sides his name resounded. Life-size pictures of him were seen posted up in the streets of Chicago, with the words "The Monk Vivekananda" beneath them, and hundreds of passers-by were observed to stop and do reverence with bowed head and folded hands to these likenesses. The press rang with his fame. The most well-known and conservative of the metropolitan newspapers proclaimed him as a prophet and a seer. Indeed, *The New York Herald* spoke of him in these words :—

"He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation."

The Boston Evening Transcript had written of him :—

"He is a great favourite at the Parliament, from the grandeur of his sentiments and his appearance as well. If he merely crosses the platform he is applauded ; and this marked approval of thousands he accepts in a child-like spirit of gratification without a trace of conceit. . . . At the Parliament of Religions they used to keep Vivekananda until the end of the programme, to make people stay till the end of the session. On a warm day, when a prosy speaker talked too long and people began going home by hundreds, the Chairman would get up and announce that Swami Vivekananda would give a short address just before the benediction. Then he would have the peaceable hundreds perfectly in tether. The four thousand fanning people in the Hall of Columbus would sit smiling and expectant, waiting for an hour or two of other men's speeches, to listen to Vivekananda for fifteen minutes. The Chairman knew the old rule of keeping the best until the last."

And later on when this paper came to know him on one of his visits to Boston, it wrote :—

Kovilloor Digital Library

"Vivekananda is really a great man, noble, simple, sincere, and learned beyond comparison with most of our scholars."

The Rutherford American remarked :—

"The Hindu monk's eloquent and thoughtful discourse before the Parliament of Religions at the Chicago Fair, made a profound impression not only on the audience who listened to him, but on the religious world generally."

The Press of America in commenting upon his success, wrote :—

"Professor Vivekananda, who is of pleasing appearance and young, and being well-filled with the ancient lore of India, made an address which captured the Congress, so to speak. There were bishops and ministers of nearly every Christian Church present and they were all taken by storm. The eloquence of the man with intellect beaming from his face, his splendid English in describing the beauties of his time-honoured faith, all conspired to make a deep impression on the audience."

The Interior Chicago said :—

"And yet this was the man who of all speakers on the platform of the Parliament of Religions awoke the most uproarious applause and was called back again and again."

The New York Critique wrote :—

"But eloquent as were many of the speeches, no one expressed so well the spirit of the Parliament of Religions and its limitations as the Hindu monk. . . . . *he is an orator by Divine Right*, and his strong intelligent face in its picturesque setting of yellow and orange was hardly less interesting than those earnest words and the rich rhythmical utterance he gave them."

This paper, like many others, had quoted the Swami's addresses in full. *The Review of Reviews* described his address as "noble and sublime." Similar brilliant accounts of the Swami's triumph appeared in other papers too numerous to quote here. Amongst personal appreciations, the Hon'ble Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell wrote sometime after :—

"No religious body made so profound an impression upon the Parliament and the American people at large, as did Hinduism.....And by far the most important and typical representative of Hinduism was Swami Vivekananda, who, in fact, was beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament. He frequently spoke, both on the floor of the Parliament itself and at the meetings of the Scientific Section, over which I had the honour to preside, and on all occasions he was

Kovilloor Digital Library

received with greater enthusiasm than any other speaker, Christian or 'Pagan.' The people thronged about him wherever he went and hung with eagerness on his every word.....The most rigid of orthodox Christians say of him, 'He is indeed a prince among men ! ..."

And the Chairman of the General Committee of the Congress, the Rev. J. H. Barrows, said :—

"Swami Vivekananda exercised a wonderful influence over his auditors."

From what have been quoted above, it would be evident that the Swami had not only influenced the Parliament, but, through the newspaper reports of his Message, even the masses of America as well. And it was this that the Swami desired,—to be introduced to the American Nation,—so that he could influence it to take a generous and active interest in his land and its religious ideas.

Hundreds upon hundreds of enlightened and liberal-minded persons, amongst them being Emersonians, Transcendentalists, Neo-Christians, Theosophists, Universalists, Congregationalists, either hearing him personally while in attendance at the Parliament, or reading the glowing accounts about him, felt that the Swami was, indeed, another Oriental Master come to them with a new Message. His broad, catholic, universal outlook, his uniform kindliness and goodwill, his powerful enunciation of the doctrines of the soul, his overwhelming strength and realisation of the Spirit, had surrounded him in their eyes with a halo of sanctity and with an aura of supreme wisdom. And so meteoric was the transformation of the Swami from obscurity to most exalted fame, that it can be truly said that he "awoke one morning to find himself famous."

But to the Swami all these brilliant records of his eloquence and the intense glorification of his name by thousands, were as so much straw. They did not only not touch or elate him, but filled him with despondency. Indeed, on the very night when he found from the newspapers that he had been ushered into the glare of celebrity, he actually wept like a child at the thought that for him the joy of the free life of the

Kovilpoor Digital Library

unknown monk was at an end. The Swami was too well acquainted with human nature to be influenced by praise. Aye, even in the midst of the publicity and applause he had unconsciously gained, he remembered Him "Who maketh the dumb a fluent speaker," and in a letter sent to India some weeks after the Parliament, when he was constantly in the public attention, he wrote to a disciple, "You would be astonished if I sent over to you the newspaper cuttings, but you already know that I am a hater of celebrity"; and in the latter part of December he wrote, "It is very strange that news of my Chicago lectures has appeared in the Indian papers, for whatever I do, I try my best to avoid publicity." But herein one finds him saying nothing new; he is only echoing that which he had written as a postscript to his letter from Yokohama, long before the Parliament, "Calm and silent and steady work, and no newspaper humbug, no name-making, you must always remember." But, in spite of the fact that he was a hater of celebrity, he was destined to be "thrown out" of his quest for forgottenness. He was the monk with a message and he had been "dragged out" by Divine Providence. He could no longer be the itinerant monk. There was to be no more the quiet, solemn peace for him; it was to be strenuous, ceaseless labour and a terrible, unintermittent demand upon his time and personality.

The Swami had taken himself and his Message seriously, and he was inspired with the courage to fulfil his Master's will. He had become bold. An incident that occurred in the Parliament,—and which is told in the second volume of the 'Historians' History of the World' by the *Times*, in pages 547 and 548, which were substituted in deference to the violent objection taken by the Indian subscribers to some serious calumnies published therein against Hinduism,—illustrate the Swami's boldness of spirit and self-confidence :—

A striking illustration of what in another case would be termed insularity of outlook was brought to view by a noted Hindu when addressing a vast audience at the World's Congress of Religions in America, in the city of Chicago, in 1893. Pausing in the midst of his discourse, the

Koviloor Digital Library

speaker asked that every member of the audience who had read the sacred books of the Hindus, and who therefore had first-hand knowledge of their religion, would raise his hand. Only three or four hands were raised, though the audience represented, presumably, the leading theologians of many lands. Glancing benignly over the assembly, the Hindu raised himself to his full height, and in a voice every accent of which must have smote the audience as a rebuke, pronounced these simple words, 'And yet you dare to judge us !'"

Aye, without catering to popularity, the Swami had assumed a severely critical attitude, and if the audience before him had not understood his greatness it would certainly have accused him of "insularity of outlook" and thought him pedantic. But his spirit was too deep, too sincere. This was his attitude all along following upon the Parliament. He found that he must be constantly on the defensive with regard to the merits of the Hindu religion. He found that India and her spiritual ideas had indeed been misrepresented to the public in the West, and now he felt that he had to give Hinduism a true status in the West; he was aware that he must constantly "defend the Faith." The Swami was not alone brilliant, but strong in the hour of his unparalleled success.

His signal success at the Parliament of Religions, however, created jealousy and heart-burning in the interested and opposing camps of the Christian Missionaries and, shame to say, in one of his own countrymen, a leader of a progressive religious movement in India. The latter unexpectedly saw that his great name and fame which had been established from before, were exposed to the chance of being eclipsed by a new rival. When asked about the antecedents of the Hindu monk he had whispered to the authorities of the Parliament that the Swami belonged to a vagabond set in India with no status or influence, and that he was a fraud. Fortunately the Parliament dignitaries were too broad-minded to accept such a statement, for the Swami's irresistible personality spoke only too eloquently for itself. And not only from these, he received no sympathy also from the Theosophical leaders and representatives in America, who tried their best

Kovilpur Digital Library

to cry him down. Those who have read the Swami's eloquent Address in Madras on "My Plan of Campaign," delivered nearly four years later, will have known from his own mouth how vigorously these three interested bodies stood in opposition against him and his propaganda in America. (*Vide* pp. 605-607, *The Complete Works of the Swami Vivekananda*). But these attempts proved futile and were overcome by the Swami's towering personality and force of character. He was the man of the hour wherever he went.

But in the midst of all his popularity the Swami's heart bled for India. Personally he had no more wants now. The mansions of some of the wealthiest of Chicago society were open to receive him, and they vied with each other in receiving him cordially as an honoured guest in their houses. He was lionised by society which prepared numerous conversaziones and receptions in his honour. On the very day that he was suddenly raised to glory, a certain gentleman of wealth and distinction invited the Swami to his magnificent home in one of the most fashionable parts of the city of Chicago. Here he was entertained right royally, every consideration being paid to him by the gentleman himself who regarded the Swami with disciple-like veneration and love. A princely room was given him fitted with luxury beyond anything he could conceive. But instead of feeling happy in his splendid environment, he was literally miserable and pained with everything that afforded him comfort. Name and fame and the intense approval of thousands had in no way shaken his humility; and though sumptuously cared for, he was the same Sannyâsin as of old, thinking of India's poor. As he retired the first night and lay upon his bed, the terrible contrast between poverty-stricken India and opulent America dawned upon him irresistibly. He could not sleep pondering over India's poverty and misery. The bed of down seemed to be a bed of thorns. The pillow was all wet with his tears. He went to the window and gazed out into the darkness until he was well nigh faint with sorrow. At length, overcome with emotion that suffocated his entire being he fell to the ground, literally

Kovilloor Digital Library

rolling in agony and crying out, "O Mother, what shall I do with name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in the utmost penury! To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come that millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comfort! Who will raise the masses in India! Who will give bread to their hungry mouths! Show me, O Mother, how I can help them." Thus he passed the night in sorrow and in tears, whilst the papers were filled with his praise and he commanded the adoration of some of the most distinguished personages in America! This is, indeed, the picture of a true patriot. Over and over again one finds the same kind of intense love for India shining out in his words and actions. The deep and spontaneous love which welled in his heart for the poor, the distressed and the despised, was the never-ceasing source of all his activities.

And his mind went on comparing his present lot with what he had often experienced as the *parivrâjaka*; aye, indeed, he compared these days with the terrible uncertainty of his early days in America itself when he had run so out of pocket that he had to cable to India for money and when, in that state he had the bitter experience of being shown the cable-gram from the head of a certain religious society to which he had appealed for help and which in turn had referred his condition to its leader. The cablegram read, "Let the devil die of cold." Such was the diabolical animosity directed against him!

Henceforth the student of the Swami's life is led into a world of intense thought and work. He will discover that along with his delivering the message of Hinduism to the West, the Swami's mind was constantly on the look-out, studying, observing, gaining new experience of everything that might be turned to advantage in solving the problems of his country. Not for one moment did the Swami forget the welfare of India. It was a characteristic of his greatness that he did not forget his motherland amidst the scenes of opulence and personal attention in which he found

Kovilloor Digital Library

himself entangled. In one way, though the dusty roads and the parched tongue and the hunger of his *parivrâjaka* days were ascetic in the extreme, yet the experiences he was about to have in that foreign land were to be even more severe. For he was to strain himself to the utmost. He would have to work until work was no longer possible and the body would break down from sheer exertion.

The first intimation and character of this work was an invitation he received from a prominent lecture bureau to make a lecturing tour all over America. Thinking that this would be the best way in which to scatter broadcast the ideas with which his mind teemed, and to disillusionise the Western mind of its erroneous notions concerning India and its culture, he consented. Moreover, it presented a favourable opportunity of extending and solidifying the influence he had wielded at the Parliament so that he would be even more able to create universal interest and sympathy for the religious ideas of the Hindus. He thought also that this would be a way to become independent; and not alone that, but particularly to help the various philanthropic and religious works in India which he had in mind to start. The lecture bureau had asked him to speak upon secular matters such as, "India and its Women", "The Manners and Customs of the Hindus," "Is India a Benighted Country?" and similar other subjects. So the next vision of the Swami is as travelling hither and thither in America, visiting numerous cities, always preaching concerning the glories of India and the greatness of Indian culture. No Indian, who has not been abroad, can gauge actually the depth of the Swami's influence in the way of giving the American mind, in particular, a new outlook concerning Hinduism, India and the East. The idea that India was a barbarous country, that its religion was primitive, and its customs unspeakably gross, was completely destroyed wherever the Swami spoke.

In his tours the Swami visited all the larger cities of the Eastern and Mid-Western States lecturing, among various other places, at Chicago, Iowa City, Des Moines, St. Louis,

Koviloor Digital Library

Indianapolis, Minneapolis, Detroit, Hartford, Buffalo, Boston Cambridge, Baltimore, Washington, Brooklyn and New York. Unfortunately there are but few details of this noteworthy tour. Here and there one catches glimpses of his illuminating utterances and the glowing descriptions of his personality as these were recorded by the *Detroit Free Press*, one of the influential papers in America and by other equally prominent journals. Just when the Swami commenced his lecturing tour is unknown. It was, however, in the very late autumn and in the early winter months when, to use his own expression, he "was always whirling to and fro". He had many experiences, some extraordinarily spiritual, showing that a great power was working in and through him, and others that were of a constantly developing character, so far as his own intellectual self was concerned. Studying America as he did, he came to know it in many ways. During this period he made his headquarters with the family of Mr. George W. Hale of Chicago, where he always received the warmest welcome and was looked upon with great reverence and regard. He often expressed himself concerning the kindness and the love he received from the members of this family; and they in their turn were devotedly attached to him.

But the lecturing tour was not altogether a pleasant experience. His ignorance with regard to suitable apparel placed him in a position in which he had only summer clothes in the winter season, and so he suffered intensely from cold. Then, too, the constant demands of the lecture bureau and the unintermittent thinking and speaking told upon him. He always spoke extempore. True, whereever he went he received enthusiastic receptions, people literally flocking about him and clergymen beseeching him to come and lecture in their churches. But wherever he went people pressed him with innumerable questions, often irritating in their nature, because they revealed a monumental ignorance on the part of the questioners of the facts and conditions of Hindu culture. It was evident that countless persons were possessed of bigoted or crude notions of life in India.

Koviloor Digital Library

Sometimes he met with persons who stupidly contradicted him and then he fell upon them like a thunderbolt. But there was with the Swami at all times a brilliance of wit and a vigour of mind, so that the *Iowa State Register* speaking of him said :—

"But woe to the man who undertook to combat the monk on his own ground and that was where they all tried it who tried it at all. His replies came like flashes of lightning and the venturesome questioner was sure to be impaled on the Indian's shining intellectual lance. The workings of his mind, so subtle and so brilliant, so well stored and so well trained, sometimes dazzled his hearers, but it was always a most interesting study. Vivekananda and his cause found a place in the hearts of all true Christians."

The Swami had no patience with small-mindedness or fanatical prejudice. In many instances he was terribly outspoken in his criticisms. He had great reverence for Christ and His teachings, but he did not always say fine and smooth things concerning current Christianity and the so-called Christians in his addresses in order to win their applause and sympathy. He pointed out to them the faults and defects of their civilisation in no unmistakable terms, and occasionally gave hard knocks. As an instance may be cited the following from one of his lectures at Detroit in the February of 1894 :—

"One thing I would tell you, and I do not mean any unkind criticism. You train and educate and clothe and pay men to do what?—to come over to my country and curse and abuse all my forefathers, my religion and my everything. They walk near a temple and say: 'You idolaters, you will go to hell!'.....But the Hindu is mild ; he smiles and passes on saying, 'Let the fools talk.' That is the attitude. And then you who train men to abuse and criticise, if I just touch you with the least bit of criticism, with the kindest of purpose, you shrink and cry : 'Don't touch us ; we are Americans, we criticise, curse and abuse all the heathens of the world, but do not touch us, we are sensitive plants.' You may do whatever you please, but we are content to live as we do ; 'and in one thing we are better off ;—we never teach our children to swallow such horrible stuff as that man is vile. And whenever your ministers criticise us let them remember this : If all India stands up and takes all the mud that is at the bottom of the Indian Ocean and throws it up against the Western countries, it will not be doing an infinitesimal part of that which you are doing to us. And what for? Did we ever send one missionary to

Kovilloor Digital Library

convert anybody in the West? We say to you, 'You are welcome to your religion, but allow us to have ours!' You call yours an aggressive religion. You are aggressive, but how many have you converted? Every sixth man in the world is a Chinese subject, all Buddhists;.....and it may not be palatable, but this Christian morality, the Catholic Church, is all derived from them. Well, and how was this done? Without the shedding of one drop of blood! With all your brag and boasting where has your Christianity succeeded without the sword? Show me one place in the whole world. One, I say, through the history of the Christian religion,—one; I do not want two. I know how your forefathers were converted. They had to be converted or killed, that was all.....'We are the only one.' And why? 'Because we can kill others.' The Arabs said that; they bragged. And where is the Arab now? He is the Bedouin. The Romans used to tell that, and where are they now? And we have been sitting there on our blocks of stone. 'Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God!' Such things tumble down; they are built upon sand; they cannot remain long. Everything that has selfishness for its basis, competition for its right hand and enjoyment as its goal, must die sooner or later. If you want to live, go back to Christ. You are not Christians. No, as a nation, you are not. Go back to Christ. Go back to Him who had nowhere to lay His head.....Yours is a religion preached in the name of luxury. What an irony of fate! Reverse this if you want to live; reverse this. It is all hypocrisy that I have heard in this country. If this nation is going to live, let it go back to Him. You cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. All this prosperity, all this from Christ! Christ would have denied all such heresies.. .....If you can join these two, this wonderful prosperity with that ideal of Christ, it is well; but if you cannot, better, go back to Him and give up these vain pursuits. Better be ready to live in rags with rags in Christ than to live in palaces without Him."

It is no wonder that utterances like these would give rise to the bitterest opposition from the bigoted sections of Christian propagandists. Some of them tried their best by hook or by crook to injure his reputation. Finding it not easy to grapple with him they began to abuse and vilify him. Failing to find any flaw in his character, they even went to the length, so the Swami said, of tempting him with young women, promising them recompense if they succeeded. They tried by all manner of means, but when they found him as simple and pure as a child, they confessed everything to him and expressed wonder that they had never before seen in their whole life any other

Koviloor Digital Library

man who could really control his bodily desires and keep himself perfectly steady and unmoved in the midst of the tests and temptations to which he had been subjected. It seems almost incredible that under the name of religion persons could have allowed themselves to go so far; but amidst all these distractions the Swami kept up his equanimity of mind, trusting to the Lord and consoling himself with the thought that the highest-minded Christians and clergymen were his avowed admirers, and in many instances even his followers. Consequently, it is not strange to find the Swami speaking the truth concerning the tactics and the monumental self-conceived superiority of the Missionary classes in his own land. He was frank also in his criticism of that provincial consciousness which he found in the West with reference to the glories of its civilisation. He found that the natural exclusiveness due to racial conceit had been aggravated by the tales of the Missionaries concerning the alleged barbarism and the benighted condition of the East and of India in particular.

Thus one finds the Swami, now in brilliant flashes of wit or repartee, or in terms of scathing criticism, uttering his views concerning the worth of Western culture. Perhaps, on one occasion he might retort with sarcastic humour as he did to his questioner in one of his lectures in Minneapolis, when asked if Hindu mothers threw their children to the crocodiles in the rivers, by saying, "Yes, Madam! They threw me in, but like your fabled Jonah I got out again." Or on another occasion he would condemn with all seriousness and with remarkable penetration, the aggressive and destructive characteristics in Western civilisation, by saying, "I am rather a plain-spoken man, but I mean well. I want to tell you the truth. I am not here to flatter you; it is not my business. If I wanted to do that I would have opened a fashionable church in Fifth Avenue in New York. You are my children. I want to show you the way out of self to God by pointing out to you your errors, your defects and your vanities. Therefore you do not find me saying at all times very fine and smooth

Kovilpur Digital Library

things about the current Christianity or your ideals of civilisation, or the peculiar forms of character and life that are developed by Western ethical standards. It was once in Detroit when the Swami mercilessly asked, "Where is your Christianity? Where is there a place for Jesus the Christ in this selfish struggle, in this constant tendency to destroy? True, if He were here to-day, He would not find a stone whereon to lay His head." When a distinguished clergyman wondered how the Swami could understand the Christ ideal so well, he replied, "Why, Jesus was an Oriental! It is therefore natural that we Orientals should understand Him truly and readily."

The Swami had many friends, both clergymen and distinguished laymen, who took up his cause and answered the criticisms against his teaching and against his personality and urged him to do likewise. But he replied, "Why should I attack in return? It is not the monk's place to defend himself. Besides, Truth will have its way; believe me, Truth shall stand." Sometimes his only reply when he was told of some baseless assertions newly made against him, would be a prayer. He would look calm and thoughtful and a great feeling of love and pity would well up from the bottom of his heart for those who were so deeply blinded in their miserable play of pursuing after selfish ends, and he would repeat, "Shiva! Shiva!" Then his face would become illumined and he would say gently, "It is only the voice of the Beloved!" Or if they who loved him would become indignant he would ask, "What difference can it make when one knows that the blamer and the blamed and the praiser and the praised are one?" Or again, under like circumstances he would tell them some story of how Sri Ramakrishna could never recognise personal abuse or malice. Everything good or bad, "the Dual throng" was from the "Beloved Mother."

As early as January, 1894, the Swami found that he was also being maliciously attacked by zealous Missionary bodies in India, which knew that his religious addresses would do harm to their proselytising activities. Among many

Kovilloor Digital Library

letters that had reached him from India, mention was made in one of them of a paper in which he was very sharply criticised. The Swami wrote in reply to a disciple:—

"The criticism of the paper you mention is not to be taken as the attitude of the American people. The paper is almost unknown here and belongs to what they call a 'blue-nose presbyterian paper,' very bigoted. Still all the 'blue-noses' are not ungentlemanly. The American people, and many of the clergy are very hospitable to me. That paper wanted a little notoriety by attacking a man who was being lionised by society. That trick is well known here, and they do not think anything of it. Of course our Indian missionaries may try to make capital out of it. If they do, tell them, 'Mark, Jew, a judgment has come upon you!' Their old building is tottering to its foundation and must come down in spite of their hysterical shrieks. I pity them—if their means of living fine lives in India is cut down by the influx of Oriental religions here. But not one of their leading clergy is ever against me."

It was true the leading clergy and all progressive thinkers and earnest-minded seekers after truth were his friends. But as for the Swami himself he was a man not given to caring for the fruits of work, being himself saturated with the spirit of the Bhagavad-Gita. He knew that if it was the Will of the Most High that his message should be scattered broadcast, not even the gates of hell could prevail against him. His was the spirit of the Rishis of old. His one earnest hope was to gain some disciples, whose spiritual earnestness and sincerity would form the nucleus about which time should gather the contents of his gospel. Otherwise amidst all the varied experiences of his American life and his thoughts and aspirations for the regeneration of his motherland, he was beyond disappointment or happy surprise at all tides of events,—the meditative monk, the spiritual genius, the man of the *parivrâjaka* background, the child of the Mother of the Universe, awaiting always the Commands and the Leading from On High.

It is said that during his sojourn in America, many ladies were fascinated with the Swami's charming personality, and some actually proposed marriage. It is well known that an heiress approached him saying, "Swami, I offer myself and

Kovilpoor Digital Library

all my riches at your feet!" But his reply was, "Madam; I am a Sannyâsin, what is marriage to me! To me all women are as my mother!" Verily, everywhere, and in all circumstances of life, the Swami was the *Monk*.

His lectures at this period, far from being merely secular, were intensely religious and philosophical. For he would not have been the man he was, had he not in every single utterance of his been the monk as well as the great thinker and scholar. Certainly, the Swami cleared the atmosphere of distorted thought with which the American public had surrounded its conception of Hinduism. The Swami found, however, that the lecture bureau was eager to get whatsoever it could without giving him just remuneration for his work. He found that he was being defrauded of his due. For example, at one lecture, the lecture bureau netted as much as $ 2,500, but from that large sum he was given only $ 200. Naturally this disgusted him. At first in order to hold him the manager had given him as much as $ 900 for a single lecture; but after a time, for reasons best known to himself, he lowered the rate until it became apparent, even to as unworldly-minded a person as the Swami, that they were making too much out of him. It was not that the audiences were falling off; indeed they gathered in larger and larger numbers and were extravagant in their applause. Finally, after several weeks, he severed his relations with the lecture bureau, though from one point of view it meant considerable pecuniary loss. But in all this gaining of glory and financial success, he had no thought of himself. His object was to save up a sufficient amount of money wherewith to start philanthropic works in different provinces of India. Eventually he came to think that his mission in life was not to gain the applause of thousands and to lecture upon secular matters for the sake of earning money even for a good purpose. He became sick of what he termed "the nonsense of public life and newspaper blazoning". As one of his foremost disciples has written :—

"He soon found, however, that he was utterly unsuited for such a

Kovilpor Digital Library

career. Naturally, he could not speak to promiscuous audiences on the topics nearest to his heart, and the life of ceaseless change was too strenuous for a contemplative nature like his own. He was at this time a far different being from what he afterwards developed into. He was dreamy and meditative, often so wrapped in his own thoughts as to be hardly conscious of his surroundings. The constant friction of alien thoughts, the endless que tioning, the frequent sharp conflict of wits in this Western world awoke in him a different spirit and he became as alert and wide-awake as the world in which he found himself."

One of the happy experiences of his lecturing tour was that he discovered that there was everywhere in America a great longing for the Highest Truth. But on the other hand he marked also the insatiable greed for gold manifest everywhere in the civilisation of the West. In the course of his travels, he met many quasi-metaphysicians and intellectual quacks who were growing fat off the religious credulity and earnestness of the people in their search for Truth. They made every effort to further their interest by entrapping him into their propaganda, but each time he became infuriated at what he saw was the most terrible form of deception for the sake of earning a mere pittance. This moved the very soul of the Swami; and he decided that he would begin work, real spiritual work, and that for this work he would not accept the smallest coin in recompense. He would give freely as the Rishis of ancient India had given in the golden days of old.

Meanwhile his mind was busied with innumerable problems, making constant contrasts of the Western with the Asiatic culture, studying the advantages of many of the industrial and economic systems of the West, so that he could apply them later on in definite and practical ways to the wants of his own people. He visited various museums, universities, institutions and art galleries trying to comprehend the spirit of Western life. Gazing at some work of art, or studying some signal engineering or architectural feat, his thought would traverse the distance from the immediate object to the subject of the greatness of the human mind. And those who were with him, either as his hosts or as his admirers, have said that to be with him was in itself an education. He became

Koviloor Digital Library

a keen student of the public and social life of America. Often he would watch with wonder the mad rush of energy on all sides and gaze aloft at the massive, sky-towering palaces of industry, that caught his eye everywhere in the metropolitan cities. And many times the contrast between the pomp and power of the Western world, its complicated and highly polished social and industrial life, and the poverty and crowded misery of the Indian cities with here and there some naked Sâdhu covered with ashes, came in upon him. And one can almost see the genius of his spirit that always held the even balance between the greatness of these two worlds,—the East and the West. He saw that in the West the Art and the Form predominate, but he knew also that in India the Heart and the Insight, the Spirit of things, prevail ; and of the two, with all the wise ones, he certainly preferred the latter. And the result of these unintermittent and thoughtful observations he has embodied in his learned treatises, entitled "The East and the West" and "Modern India."

And yet, all this while, though he was intensely preoccupied with various thoughts, he did not forget those who were his disciples in the East. He often received letters from his disciples in Madras, Rajputana and other places and kept up a regular correspondence with them, teaching, consoling, and inspiring them with his own enthusiasm. He in turn urged upon them the necessity of organisation and united effort and of trust in God, giving them also much insight into the modes and customs and the greatness of Western life. But above all he was spiritually concerned with them and the Guru in him came out in his every utterance. He had met numerous women of high intellectual attainments in America, and it was his delight to cross swords with them intellectually. This was a new experience, for in India, the *zenana* system excludes one from social and intellectual contact with women. Thus one sees the Swami in his letters to Indian disciples drawing sharp distinctions between the emancipation of Western women and the seclusion of women amongst his own people. He writes, "Can you better the

Kovilloor Digital Library

condition of your women? Then there will be hope for your well-being. Otherwise you will remain as backward as you are now." And he concludes by saying, "As regards spirituality, the Americans are far inferior to us, but their society is far superior to ours. We will teach them our spirituality, and assimilate what is best in their society."

It was touching to many who met him in the West to see how he endeavoured to fit himself in with the Western standards of good manners. East and West, so different in all other things, are different also in their forms of etiquette. He would oftentimes pause to observe, or would turn to his host or hostess, questioning with all the simplicity of a child as to the right of certain social forms. "How is it?" he would ask, "Does the gentleman or the lady precede in coming up or going down the stairs?" Whensoever he was entertained as a guest his host and hostess invariably allowed him every personal freedom. They understood him, for at any time the mood of insight might come upon him and he might be exalted in the vision of the hour, so that of a sudden his personality would seem to have been lifted out of the company in which he found himself and to have become oblivious to what chanced to happen about him. Even as was the case with his Master, the simplest phenomenon of life might speak to him of revelations and of spiritual truths. The states of meditation and recollection were always with him. Writes the Sister Nivedità :—

"The Swami never seemed, it must be remembered, to be doing *tapasyâ*, but his whole life was a concentration so intense that for any one else it would have been a most terrible *tapasyâ*. When he first went to America, it was extremely difficult for him to control the momentum that carried him into meditation. 'When he sits down to meditate,' had said one whose guest he was in India, 'in two minutes he feels nothing, though his body be black with mosquitoes.' With this habit thus deeply ingrained, he landed in America, that country of railroads and tramways, and complicated engagement lists, and at first it was no uncommon thing for him to be carried two or three times round a tram-circuit, only disturbed periodically by the conductor asking for the fare. He was very much ashamed of such occurrences, however, and worked hard to overcome them. * * *"

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXI

VARYING EXPERIENCES AS PREACHER.

Before one proceeds to enter with the Swami into that life which he led as a great teacher, training a group of earnest disciples in America, it would be well to take into account many experiences that he had had by the way as a lecturer touring through the country. Naturally he met many persons of note and distinction, and of these was the famous agnostic and orator, Mr. Robert Ingersoll, with whom the Swami on several occasions discussed religious and philosophical subjects. During the course of these conversations the great agnostic cautioned the Swami not to be so bold and outspoken as he was, and to be careful in his preaching of new doctrines and as to the statements he might make in the way of reflections against the ways of life and thought of the people. When the latter asked him the reason of his saying so, Mr. Ingersoll replied, "Forty years ago you would have been hanged if you had come to preach in this country. You would have been burned alive ; or, you would have been stoned out of the villages, if you had come even much later." The Swami was surprised ; he could not believe that there was such a great element of fanaticism and bigotry in the American nation, and he told Mr. Ingersoll as much. But there was a difference between the modes of teaching of these two great preachers ; for Mr. Ingersoll antagonised all religious ideas, whereas the Swami, though presenting a new order of religious thought, was all-tolerant in matters of religion and a devoted admirer of the Virgin and the Christ. The difference between these two great souls is best presented in an anecdote the Swami himself has told. "Ingersoll once said to me," mentioned the Swami in the course of a class talk, "'I believe in making the most out of this world, in squeezing the orange dry, because this world is all we are

Kovilpur Digital Library

sure of.' I replied, 'I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do ; and I get more out of it. I *know* I cannot die, so I am not in a hurry. I know that there is no fear, so I enjoy the squeezing. I have no duty, no bondage of wife and children and property ; and so I can love all men and women. Everyone is God to me. Think of the joy of loving man as God ! Squeeze your orange this way and get ten thousandfold more out of it. Get every single drop !"

That the Swami should ever have been able to be so frank and intimate with a man like Mr. Ingersoll, proves what an entrée he had into the most exclusive intellectual circles. He was not only admitted into the society of the fashionables, who had literally lionised him in Chicago, but was also sought out and listened to with respect by the most brilliant intellects of the country. He made his way everywhere by his sweet and yet convincing eloquence, and broadened the minds of those with whom he came into contact in regard to matters of religion. Also in his private life during his lecture tour, he exerted a great influence over many persons who after hearing his discourses would seek him out at his lodgings and listen to the words of wisdom that fell like nectar from his lips.

One of the most trying experiences that the Swami had while on his lecturing tour occurred when he was visiting a Western town. Hearing him speak of Indian philosophy, a number of university men, who had taken up the ranch-life and the cowboy's occupation, took him at his word for saying that one who has realised the Highest is equanimous in all conditions of life and is not disturbed by any outward influences. They wanted to put him to a test and so invited him to lecture to them. When he arrived they escorted him to a wooden tub which they had placed with the bottom up to serve as a platform in the public compound of their village. The Swami commenced his address and became all-absorbed in the subject-matter of his discourse. Suddenly there was the deafening noise of shots whizzing

Koviloor Digital Library

past his ears! He went on with his lecture, however, till the end as though nothing was happening. He had retreated into the consciousness of that Innermost of which he was speaking. When he had uttered his last words, the cowboys flocked about him, and in their boisterous language, but with loving hearts, they called him "a right good fellow." Had the Swami exhibited the faintest sign of having been alarmed at their test they would have called him "A Tenderfoot," a term of reproach with which they label the effeminate or inexperienced Easterner or man of fashion, who comes newly to their ranch-towns.

Indeed, the Swami had many odd experiences, but one which he repeated, as a joke upon himself, happened in a small town, likewise in the mid-Western States. It was in the days when he lectured most strenuously, running on from one place to another, with only a gladstone bag, sometimes giving as many as two to three lectures a day, arriving at one place, giving his lecture, and thence proceeding immediately to another place. He was exhausted when he arrived at the provincial town in question. The secretary of the reception committee showed him courteously into a small room, which chanced to be dark and contained a rather frail sample of an arm-chair. Seeing it dimly, the Swami sat down upon it when, to use his own words, "Lo! It gave way and that, too, in the most awkward manner possible. I went down backwards and could not for the life of me extricate myself. The more I exerted, the more danger was there of my hurting myself and ruining my clothes. So I just had to stay in that uncomfortable position until the secretary came to escort me to the platform, calling out to me, 'Come, Swami, the audience is waiting for you.' 'Well, then,' I cried out, 'I suppose it will have to wait till you break this chair and manage to extricate me out of the nice plight I am in!' He then helped me to get up and we had a hearty laugh over it." The manner in which the Swami told this good story of himself sent his friends and disciples into fits of laughter.

Koviloor Digital Library

But this amusing incident is complemented by another, the character of which for its dignity, its genuine human touch is incomparable, revealing the fineness, and at the same time, the greatness of the man. Being an Oriental he was, to an American, naturally dark in colour, and oftentimes in the South he was mistaken for a negro. Times were when he was insulted by people who, if he had but uttered his name, would have stood aghast at their conduct towards a man of his fame ; but the Swami invariably received rude remarks and rude glances with something one might have called a spiritual hauteur and a grand indifference. What was race-prejudice to him who saw in every man his brother ? When he was travelling, often his fellow-passengers, studying the "coloured man" before them, were overawed by the play of the lofty emotions upon his countenance and, entering into conversation with him, would discover the Oriental to be "a Wise Man of the East." Once, when he was leaving a train, a negro porter, who had seen the Swami welcomed by a reception committee, came up to him, saying that he had heard how in him one of his own people had become a great man and that he would like to have the privilege of shaking hands with him. The Swami warmly clasped the hands of the railway-porter and exclaimed, "Thank you ! Thank you, brother !" He related similar confidences that had been rendered him by negroes whom he met casually ; he never resented to be thought of as one of them. It happened so, several times, that when he had come to an important city of the South, during his lecturing tour, he was refused admittance to the hotels because of his dark appearance, the proprietors saying that they could not accommodate a negro and showing him the door with scant courtesy ; but even in these dilemmas he refused to say that he was an Oriental. Thereupon the manager of his lecturing tour had to make other arrangements for him. When the hotel people read his lectures in the morning papers and heard his name spoken broadcast with reverence they were mortified and hurried to him to offer apologies. Even in Northern cities when he presented himself to be shaved

Koviloor Digital Library

in a barber's shop, he was shown the door with caustic remarks. Long after, when a Western disciple referring to these incidents asked him in surprise why he had not informed them who he was, he replied as if whispering his own thoughts in soliloquy, "What ! Rise at the expense of another ! I did not come to earth for that !" Certainly he was supremely indifferent to either praise or blame with regard to his personality. These reversals of fortune he never seemed to notice. He was never ashamed of his race. On the contrary, he was proud that he was an Indian, and whensoever any white man exhibited any vulgar social exultation before him, because of the fairness of his skin, he would not escape his stern reproof. The Sister Nivedità has written :—

"He was scornful in his repudiation of the *pseudo*-ethnology of privileged races. 'If I am grateful to my white-skinned Aryan ancestor,' he said, 'I am far more so to my yellow-skinned Mongolian ancestor, and most so of all, to the black-skinned Negritoid !'

"He was immensely proud, in his own physiognomy, of what he called his 'Mongolian jaw,' regarding it as a sign of 'bull-dog tenacity of purpose' ; and referring to this particular race-element, which he believed to be behind every Aryan people, he one day exclaimed, 'Don't you see? The Tartar is the wine of the race ! He gives energy and power to every blood !'"

Wheresoever he went in the course of his lecture tours the Swami found his name blazoned in the papers. The reporters and editors literally besieged him on all sides. He was made to answer innumerable questions with regard to his habits of life, his religion, his philosophy, his views of Western civilisation, his scheme of future work, his diet, his antecedents, the manners and customs of his people, the political conditions of his land, and a host of other subjects. In this manner the newspapers made the American public acquainted with each detail of his own and his country's history. When he came to Detroit, in the month of February, 1894, he was sought after by newspaper reporters day in and day out. It would be well to quote here what one of the leading journals of this city writes concerning him,—the *Detroit Free Press*, not only one of the leading papers of that city, but of

Koviloor Digital Library

America itself,—as the description of the Swami given in this paper is very similar to what was printed of him elsewhere in other cities :—

" * * One of the most popular of these Hindu representatives was Swami Vivekananda, * * He showed himself to be one of the best of orators at the Congress, speaking faultless English without notes, and with an utterance that many of his hearers declared would of itself have been music had you not understood a word.

"Since the Parliament he has spoken to immense audiences in many towns and cities, who have but one opinion of praise and are enthusiastic over his magnetic power and his way of giving light and life to every subject he touches upon. Naturally his views of great questions, coming like himself from the other side of the globe, are refreshing and stirring to American people. His hearers are pleasantly astonished when the dark-hued, dark-haired, dignified man rises in rich yellow robes and speaks their own language with fluency, distinctness and correctness.

"He is to address Detroit audiences at the Unitarian church, on Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings of this week."

Commenting upon his lectures, the *Detroit Free Press* continues in its issue of February 15, 1894 :—

"An audience that filled the Unitarian church heard the renowned Swami Vivekananda deliver a lecture last evening on the manners and customs of his country. His eloquent and graceful manner pleased his listeners, who followed him from beginning to end with the closest attention, showing approval from time to time by outbursts of applause. While his lecture was more popular in character than the celebrated address before the religious congress in Chicago, it was highly entertaining, especially where the speaker diverted from the instructive portions and was led to an eloquent narration of certain spiritual conditions of his own people. It is upon matters religious and philosophical (and thus necessarily spiritual) that the Eastern brother is most impressive, and, while outlining the duties that follow the conscientious consideration of the great moral law of nature, his softly modulated tones, a peculiarity of his people, and his thrilling manner are almost prophetic. He speaks with marked deliberation, except when placing before his listeners some moral truth, and then his eloquence is of the highest kind.

"It seemed somewhat singular that the Eastern monk who is so outspoken in his disapproval of missionary labour on the part of the Christian church in India (where, he affirms, the morality is the highest in the world) should have been introduced by Bishop Ninde,

Koviloor Digital Library

who in June will depart for China in the interest for foreign Christian missions. * * * The bishop referred to the wonders of India and the intelligence of the educated classes there, introducing Vivekananda in a happy manner. When that dusky gentleman arose, dressed in his turban and bright gown, with handsome face and bright, intelligent eyes, he presented an impressive figure. He returned thanks to the bishop for his words and proceeded to explain race divisions in his own country, the manners of the people and the different languages.

"* * * * The speaker concluded in an eloquent manner. Throughout his speech was simple, but whenever he indulged in imagery it was delightfully poetic, showing that the Eastern brother has been a close and attentive observer of the beauties of nature. His excessive spirituality is a quality which makes itself felt with his auditors, for it manifests itself in the love for animate and inanimate things, and in the keen insight into the mysterious workings of the divine law of harmony and kindly intentions."

Commenting on his lecture of February 18, 1894, this same paper reports :—

"Swami Vivekananda, Hindu philosopher and priest, concluded his series of lectures, or rather sermons, at the Unitarian church last night, speaking on 'The Divinity of Man.' In spite of the bad weather, the church was crowded almost to the doors, half an hour before the Eastern brother—as he likes to be called—appeared. All professions and business occupations were represented in the attentive audience,—lawyers, judges, ministers of the Gospel, merchants, a Rabbi,—not to speak of the many ladies who have, by their repeated attendance and rapt attention, shown a decided inclination to shower adulation upon the dusky visitor, whose drawing-room attraction is as great as his ability in the rostrum.

"The lecture last night was less descriptive than preceding ones, and for nearly two hours Vivekananda wove a metaphysical texture on affairs human and divine, so logical that he made science appear like common sense. It was a beautiful logical garment that he wove, replete with as many bright colours and as attractive and pleasing to contemplate as one of the many-hued fabrics made by hand in his native land and scented with the most seductive fragrance of the Orient. The dusky gentleman uses poetical imagery as an artist uses colours, and the hues are laid on just where they belonged, the result being somewhat bizarre in effect, and yet having a peculiar fascination. Kaleidoscopic were the swiftly succeeding logical conclusions, and the deft manipulator was rewarded for his efforts from time to time by enthusiastic applause."

CC-0. Digitized by eGangotri

Referring to still another lecture of the Swami the *Detroit Free Press*, in its issue of February 22, says :—

"The most interesting lecture Vivekananda has yet delivered was that of yesterday afternoon at the residence of Mrs. John J. Bagley, on the different Hindu philosophies. The large rooms were crowded. The monk spoke for two hours about the different philosophies, showing how thousands of years ago the spiritual science of India had reached a condition equal to that of to-day. As on other occasions the talk was freely interspersed with charming stories from the Sanskrit. * * "

Concluding its remarks the *Press* says :—

"It will not be soon forgotten, the impression created in Detroit intellectual circles, by the advent of Swami Vivekananda. * * * His influence at the Congress of Religions at Chicago was profoundly felt, and was not less so when he visited Detroit. His teachings and suggestions had much weight with the local Theosophists."

In publishing a report of the lecture by Swamiji at Detroit, from which we have quoted on page 314, the *Boston Evening Transcript*, of 5th April, 1894, prefaces it with the following editorial comments :—

"Swami Vivekananda has been in Detroit recently and made a profound impression there. All classes flocked to hear him, and professional men in particular were greatly interested in his logic and his soundness of thought. The opera-house alone was large enough for his audience. He speaks English extremely well, and he is as handsome as he is good. The Detroit newspapers have devoted much space to the reports of his lectures. An editorial in the *Detroit Evening News* says,—Most people will be inclined to think that Swami Vivekananda did better last night in his opera-house lecture than he did in any of his former lectures in this city. The merit of the Hindu's utterances last night lay in their clearness. He drew a very sharp line of distinction between Christianity and Christianity, and told his audience plainly wherein he himself was a Christian in one sense and not a Christian in another sense. He also drew a sharp line between Hinduism and Hinduism, carrying the implication that he desired to be classed as a Hindu only in its better sense. Swami Vivekananda stands superior to all criticism when he says,—'We want missionaries of Christ. Let such come to India by the hundreds and thousands. Bring Christ's life to us and let it permeate the very core of society. Let Him be preached in every village and corner of India.'

"When a man is as sound as that on the main question, all else that he may say must refer to the subordinate details. There is infinite humiliation in this spectacle of a pagan priest reading lessons of conduct

Koviloor Digital Library

and of life to the men who have assumed the spiritual supervision of 'Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand'; but the sense of humiliation is the *sine qua non* of most reforms in this world. Having said what he did of the glorious life of the author of the Christian faith, Vivekananda has the right to lecture the way he has, the men who profess to represent that life among the nations abroad. And after all, how like the Nazarene that sounds,—'Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat.' Those who have become at all familiar with the religious literature of India before the advent of Vivekananda, are best prepared to understand the utter abhorrence of the Orientals of our Western commercial spirit—or what Vivekananda calls, 'the shopkeeper's spirit'—in all that we do even in our very religion.

"Here is a point for the missionaries which they cannot afford to ignore. They who would convert the Eastern world of paganism, must live up to what they preach, in contempt for the kingdoms of this world and all the glory of them.

"Brother Vivekananda considers India the most moral nation in the world. Though in bondage, its spirituality still endures. (Here are extracts from the notices of some of his recent Detroit addresses.) * * * At this point the lecturer struck the great moral keynote of his discourse stating that with his people it was the belief that all non-self is good and all self is bad. This point was emphasised throughout the evening and might be termed the text of the address."

Writing of her appreciation of the Swami, in his first visit to Detroit, Mrs. Mary C. Funke, a well-known society woman of that city says many years after :—

"February 14th, 1894, stands out in my memory as a day apart, a sacred, holy day; for it was then that I first saw the form and listened to the voice of that great soul, that spiritual giant, the Swami Vivekananda, who, two years later, to my great joy and never-ceasing wonder, accepted me as a disciple.

"He had been lecturing in the large cities of this country, and on the above date gave the first of a series of lectures in Detroit, in the Unitarian Church. The large edifice was literally packed and the Swami received an ovation. I can see him yet as he stepped upon the platform, a regal, majestic figure, vital, forceful, dominant, and at the first sound of the wonderful voice, a voice all music—now like the plaintive minor strain of an Eolian harp, again, deep, vibrant, resonant—there was a hush, a stillness that could almost be felt, and the vast audience breathed as one man.

Koviloor Digital Library

"The Swami gave five public lectures and he held his audiences, for his was the grasp of the 'master hand,' and he spoke as one with authority. His arguments were logical, convincing, and in his most brilliant oratorical flights never once did he lose sight of the main issue,—the truth he wished to drive home."

Indeed, one of the notable characteristics in all the Swami's addresses delivered in these times, which the newspaper descriptions of him did not fail to notice, was, as they say, "His patriotism was perfervid. The manner in which he speaks of 'My country' is most touching. That one phrase revealed him not only as a monk, but as a man of his people." Patriotism and the marked greatness of his intellectual genius, together with his unusual capacities for spiritual idealism, were particularly typical of him in this period.

Everywhere he went the Swami gave himself and his time unstintingly in service. He gave and gave, until the strain upon his personality became intense. Each invitation he followed up, thinking that it was an opportunity afforded him to help others. He felt that he was being guided by the Lord ; and it was true of him that he exerted as great an influence in private as in public life. To present the ideals of the civilisation and the religious consciousness of his own race to the peoples of the West, to enhance the spiritual vision of all with whom he came into contact, to enlighten the Western minds with the knowledge of the Advaita Vedanta,—it was these intentions which possessed him. The spiritual side of his message was constantly in the foreground, and he found that though India might be seriously in need of material aid, the West stood infinitely more in need of spiritual assistance. So he decided that he should give himself to the West as well as to the East, that he should give himself, in fact, to the whole wide world.

Everywhere during this period and continuously the Swami received invitation after invitation to speak before clubs and churches and before private gatherings. Most of these he readily accepted in so far as was practicable for him, and thus it is no wonder to find him travelling here and

Koviloor Digital Library

there and everywhere in the Eastern and Mid-Western States of America, "whirling to and fro" numbers of times from Chicago to New York and from Boston to Baltimore. Everywhere he made sermons of his addresses, and everywhere he found that the fame of the "Orange Monk" had preceded him. He found himself besieged by hundreds of people, eager to know more of that philosophy and religious spirit of which his personality was to them in itself the master-embodiment. Everywhere he inculcated the spirit of the Vedas and of the Vedanta, preaching the incomparable glory of the lore of the Vedic Rishis and of the Saints of Hindusthân. In the North and in the South, in the East and in the West of the United States he travelled, impressing his realisation, his character and his message upon the thought-currents of the nation. Hundreds of the most educated and the most refined became his ardent admirers and adherents, regarding him as an apostolic messenger of a New Religious Order. Everywhere one finds the Swami working for the consolidation of his message at the Parliament, and everywhere he observed that the American mind was deeply earnest and fully ready for the assimilation of new and enlightened spiritual ideas. Everywhere he went the Swami did what he could to right the wrong that had been done to Oriental culture, as a whole, and to the Indian religious world, in particular, by denouncing the gross and malicious libels showered upon them by ignorant and bigoted Christian missionaries who had hitherto represented Hinduism as a religion of ghastly superstitions and unmentionable diabolisims. He preached the dogmas of the Inherent Divinity and of Final Realisation, making the Upanishads his scripture and making the Advaita Vedanta his message. He preached the attainment of Brahman the Absolute as the goal and the fourfold path of Yoga as the means.

The Swami had to deliver twelve to fourteen lectures or sometimes even more within a week. He felt greatly overdone with excessive physical and mental strain. It would have been strange, indeed, had he not tired himself by his exertions to

Kovilpor Digital Library

meet so many public and private engagements at this period. He himself has confessed that on his lecture tour he was after a time strained for ideas and that he felt as if he had exhausted himself intellectually. On such occasions he asked himself, "What is to be done! What shall I say in my lecture to-morrow!" And in response to his earnest desire to sound the very bottom of the creative faculty for original ideas he had many wonderful experiences. At the dead of night he would hear a voice shouting at him the very thoughts which he was to speak on the morrow. Sometimes it would come from a long distance, speaking to him down a great avenue, as it were; and then it would draw nearer and nearer. Or it would be like someone delivering a lecture standing by him, while he lay on his bed listening thereto. And what original thoughts expressed in beautiful words he would hear! At other times two voices would speak in argument before him, discussing at great length subjects that the Swami would find himself repeating on the following day upon the platform or in the pulpit. Sometimes these discussions involved ideas that the Swami had never heard or thought of previously. He would in some instances arise from his bed and write down all that he had heard.

He was not, however, puzzled at these strange happenings, and interpreted them as manifestations of the wider functioning of faculities. He spoke of them as subjective, as mere automatic workings of the mind. The mind, imbued with given forms of thought, works instinctively in their enlargement and on the creative faculties for their more perfect presentation and utterance. It was perhaps an extreme case of the mind becoming its own *Guru* and the Swami believed that the Rishis of old must have had such self-revelation in composing the Upanishads. Commenting upon these experiences to his more intimate disciples he would remark that they constituted what had been hitherto classified and regarded as inspiration. Yet, though the Swami ascribed only a highly developed subjective character to these experiences, it must be noted that there were inmates of the

Kovilpor Digital Library

same residence who would ask him in the morning, "Swami, with whom were you discussing last night? We heard you talking loudly and enthusiastically and we were wondering." Hearing this, the Swami would smile at their bewilderment and would answer in some far-fetched manner, leaving them mystified, but to his disciples he would explain, speaking of the powers and potentialities of the Self, and they would be wonderstruck to see that he denied them to be *miracles*.

During this time and at certain subsequent periods of his stay in the West the Swami felt several extraordinary yoga powers developed spontaneously in him in a remarkable manner. But in all these there was no display of psychic power. Though he felt that he had in these powers the nets wherewith to catch souls, rarely did he ever exercise them with determination; and in the few cases that he did, it was only for some grave reason, and that was assuredly not to gain name and fame or some selfish ends, but invariably to help a truly good soul, too feeble to rise above certain weaknesses and evil influences. He could change, if he so wished, the whole trend of the life of any one by a simple touch. He could see clearly things happenings within a great distance. And some of the intimate disciples to whom he would casually disclose this fact, becoming sceptic, prevailed upon him to allow them to test him, in spite of his abhorrence of making a display of psychic powers, and they invariably found his words to be true in every particular. And it so happened that on many an occasion his students would find him answering and solving those very doubts and questions which they would be thinking of at the moment. He could also read one's past life through and through and could see at a glance the contents of one's mind. Thus sometimes many of those who were sincere seekers after truth, feeling the correctness of his utterances, became his disciples and enthusiastic helpers in his work, and those who were bad at heart never crossed his way, being afraid that he would know and might expose their secret thoughts and deeds. As an example may be cited the case of a wealthy citizen of

Kevilon Digital Library

Chicago, who meeting the Swami referred rather flippantly to his assertions with regard to the powers of a spiritually illumined Yogi and challenged him to prove them. The man said, "Well, Sir, if all this which you say be true then tell me something of my mental make-up, or of my past!" The Swami hesitated a moment; then his eyes fixed themselves upon those of the man as though he would pierce, by some quiet but irresistible power, through the body to the naked soul. The man at once became nervous. His flippancy gave way to sudden seriousness and fear and he exclaimed, "O Swami, what are you doing to me? It seems as if my whole soul is being churned and all the secrets of my life are being called up in strong colours!" When the gentleman left the Swami's presence he admitted being fully convinced of the latter's words. The Swami never attached any importance to these powers as marks of the highest spirituality and never cared to exercise them. At all times he kept himself spiritually self-possessed, colouring each and every experience in spiritual terms and perceiving in everything the glory of the Spirit. All the illumination which his soul had known in the years of his *sadhana* and austerities pressed in upon him in intense and multiform ways, the currents of spiritual energy running in various directions, increasing the overwhelming command over men which he possessed and developing within him a contagious religious fervour.

People who had listened for years with increasing dissatisfaction to numerous preachers of modern cults, came to hear his lectures and had their souls aroused and their spiritual hopes fulfilled. His utterances were novel, his realisation was genuine, he spoke what he felt and had himself seen, and thus those who had knocked long at the doors of wisdom found that through his personality new visions of life were opening out to them. And those who had him as their guest at this time would speak of him as a kaleidoscopic genius, enriching his surroundings with a many-sided greatness. Artist, historian, the master-singer, the thinker of luminous ideas, the possessor of amiable personal qualities, the eager

Koviloor Digital Library

student, the rigid observer, the wit, the monk, the teacher, the prophet and the saint—it is no wonder that those who came in intimate contact with him would say that he was a soul of unspeakable beauty and grandeur and, that he transcended their previous notions of greatness or of saintship.

In September, 1894, finding that his American work had been wilfully misrepresented in Calcutta and that enterprising publishers were printing books of his speeches and sayings in such a way "as to savour of political views," he wrote with vehemence to a disciple in Madras stating:—

"I am no politician or political agitator. I care only for the Spirit..... So you must warn the Calcutta people that no political significance be ever attached falsely to any of my writings or sayings. What nonsense.....I heard that the Rev. Kali Charan Bannerji in a lecture to the Christian missionaries had said that I was a political delegate. If it was said publicly, then publicly ask the Babu from me, to write to any of the Calcutta papers and prove it, or else take back his foolish assertion.....I have said a few harsh words in honest criticism of Christian Governments in general, but that does not mean that I care for, or have any connection with politics. * * Tell my friends that a uniform silence is all my answer to my detractors. * * This nonsense of public life and newspaper blazoning has disgusted me thoroughly. I long to go back to the Himalayan quiet."

Only a man of the Swami's calibre could have lived the intense life that he led at this time. With much uncertainty about him, with his mind constantly observing and studying and constantly giving forth its spiritual contents, with his heart hoping to do the Will of the Most High efficiently, with his daily talks and lectures in the different cities of America, with his letters to India and his untiring solicitation for the welfare of his Indian disciples, with his constant efforts at disillusionising the Western mind of its erroneous notions about the culture of his people, with his constant rush from one place to another,—it is no wonder to find him, here and there, longing for the retreats and silence of the distant Himalayas.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXII

THE CALCUTTA TOWN-HALL MEETING.

Already news had poured into India concerning the unparalleled success of the Swami in America. The Indian journals and magazines were filled with the American reports of his great address at the Parliament, and glowing editorials continued to appear in them. These quotations, extracts and comments were literally devoured by the Hindus, from Madras to Almora and from Calcutta to Bombay, and they felt proud of their "hero" and of their now world-recognised religion.

Closing one's vision for the time to the excitement of the public in India over the fame of the Swami, one enters the monastery at Baranagore, where the monks of Ramakrishna prayed and meditated. They had wondered daily for all these years where their Leader could be. They, too, read the accounts of the Swami's success, but they had not known that he had assumed the name, Vivekananda. Thus they were at first puzzled ; but they remembered the words of Sri Ramakrishna concerning him, and they felt it must be he. For some weeks they wondered, reading the accounts as they appeared, eager to see if some antecedents of the "Swami Vivekananda" were brought to light by which they could know for certain that it was their beloved "Noren." Finally they did appear ; and some time after also a letter from the Swami himself reached them, but it was not till six months had passed since his triumph at the Parliament. Now they knew, and their happiness was inexpressible. Yes, it was a great spiritual test ; the thought of the Master and of all his prophecies concerning "Norendra" stirred their hearts. They were amazed to see what a true prophetic vision their Lord had had ; and they felt also that it would come to pass what the Master had said, "Noren shall shake the world to its foundation !"

Koviloor Digital Library

As for the public in India, with the glowing accounts of the Swami and of the Hinduism he had preached, with the warm welcome accorded to Hindu ideas which India, through the Swami had received, millions of his countrymen were beside themselves with joy. This was a new order of experience for Hindusthan,—to have the vainglorious West acknowledge her greatness, when heretofore it had regarded her as a benighted land, circumscribed by semi-barbarous forms of social life and full of demoralising superstitions. India now discovered to what lengths of ignorant and slanderous statement those who had come from afar as messengers of Christianity had gone to paint her condition in the blackest terms so as to fill the coffers of missionary enterprise. Above all, she also discovered that the Swami had vindicated her position as "the Spiritual Teacher of the World".

The Swami's name became, indeed, a household word in every province of India. Madras and Bengal were naturally most enthusiastic and cordial in their appreciation. Finally this enthusiasm fanned itself into a great flame, and all over the country from Râmnâd, in the distant South, to far-off Rajputana in the North, large and influential meetings were held to send addresses to the Swami congratulating him on his success and applauding his work in the cause of Hinduism in America. Bhaskar Setupati, the Rajah of Râmnâd, sent a cable congratulating him. Rajah Ajit Singh Bahadur of Khetri presided over a Durbar held for this special purpose, and conveyed to Swamiji in his own name and that of his subjects the heart-felt thanks of the State for his worthy representation of Hinduism at the Chicago Parliament. And in Madras, Rajah Sir Ramaswamy Moodaliar, Dewan Bahadur Sir Subramanya Aiyer, C. I. E., and many other distinguished citizens and scholars took part in a great meeting where stirring speeches were made, the reports of which were duly sent to the Swami. At Kumbhakonum and other cities in the South, meetings were also held with the same enthusiasm and the addresses sent to him. But in

Koviloor Digital Library

Calcutta, the birthplace of the Swami, the enthusiasm reached a pitch of frenzy. Indeed, India, as a whole, had arisen as one man to do him honour. And the Swami in distant America, moving in the most distinguished circles, felt in the sanction of all India to his work and message not so much as a personal appreciation of himself, but as a sure sign that the centre of the national ideal of ancient Aryavarta was all sound,—that its spiritual foundation stood unshaken, strong as ever. He felt a stirring of hope, and one vision he saw clear as life before him,—"That the Ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne, rejuvenated, more glorious than ever." He accepted the generous appreciations of his work in this spirit and sent addresses of reply to those who had forwarded them, the most notable and stirring of them all being those to the Hindus of Madras and to the Rajah of Khetri.

Calcutta being the very heart of the intellectual life of modern India, and being also the capital, at that time, of the whole Indian Empire, it is well to describe in full the character and the proceedings of the Town-Hall meeting held in this city on Wednesday, the fifth of September, 1894, to thank Swami Vivekananda and the American people. The meeting was organised by the most representative members of the Hindu Community, such as Pundit Rajkumar Nyayaratna, Babu Ishan Chandra Mookherjee, Maharaj-Kumar Benoy Krishna Bahadur, Babu Guru Prosonna Ghose and Rai Nunda Lall Bose, and was unusually representative, many thousands of persons taking part, including every section of Hindus. Long before the meeting was commenced, the hall was crowded to its utmost capacity, even standing-room being at a premium. Many orthodox Pandits and Hindu Brahmachârins and Sannyâsins were present. Amongst the most distinguished Pandits present there were Madhusudan Smritiratna, Kamakhyanath Tarkabagis, Uma Charan Tarkaratna, Chandi Charan Smrititirtha, Ramanath Tarkasiddhanta, Kedar Nath Vidyaratna, Mohesh Chandra Churamani, Nundo Kumar Nyaya-

Kovilpur Digital Library

ratna, Kailas Nath Vidyaratna, Tarapada Vidyasagar, Benimadhab Tarkalankar, Jadu Nath Sarbabhouma, Ambica Charan Nyayaratna, Baikuntha Nath Vidyaratna and Shiv Narayan Siromani. Besides, there were Raja Peary Mohun Mookherjee, C. S. I.; Hon'ble Justice Gurudas Bannerjee, D. L.; Hon'ble Surendra Nath Bannerjee; N. N. Ghose, Esqr, Editor, *Indian Nation*; Babu Norendra Nath Sen, Editor, *Indian Mirror*; Dr. J. B. Daly, Editor, *Indian Daily News*; Babu Soshi Bhusan Mookherjee, Editor, *National Guardian*; Babu Amrita Lal Roy, Editor, *Hope*; Rai Sheo Bux Bogla Bahadur; Babu Bhupendra Nath Bose; J. Padshah Esqr.; Right Rev. N. Sadhananda of Ceylon; Kumar Dinendra Nath Roy; Kumar Radha Prosad Roy; Rai Rakhal Chandra Chowdhury, Zemindar, Barisal; Rai Jotindra Nath Chowdhury, Zemindar, Taki; and many other distinguished persons, too numerous to mention. Pleaders, vakils, physicians, politicians, wealthy landlords, professors and prominent men of many other walks of life, took part in the meeting. Many gentlemen of leading, including Rajah Rajendra Narayan Deb Bahadur, son of the late Rajah Sir Radhakanta Deb Bahadur, K. C. S. I., and Sir Romesh Chandra Mittra, Kt., late Judge of the High Court of Calcutta, who were unavoidably prevented from attending the meeting, wrote letters sympathising with its object.

The Chairman of the meeting was Raja Peary Mohun Mookherjee, C. S. I. The Resolutions moved and adopted were as follows:—

"I. That this meeting desires to record its grateful appreciation of the great services rendered to the cause of Hinduism by Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and of his subsequent work in America.

"II. That this meeting tenders its best thanks to Dr. J. H. Barrows, the Chairman, and Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell, the President of the Scientific Section of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and to the American people generally, for the cordial and sympathetic reception they have accorded to Swami Vivekananda.

"III. That this meeting requests the Chairman to forward to Sreemat Vivekananda Swami, Dr. Barrows and Mr. Snell copies of the

Koviloor Digital Library

foregoing Resolutions together with the following letter addressed to Swami Vivekananda.

"To Sreemat Vivekananda Swami.

"Dear Sir,

"As Chairman of a large, representative and influential meeting of the Hindu inhabitants of Calcutta and the Suburbs, held in the Town Hall of Calcutta, on the fifth of September, 1894, I have the pleasure to convey to you the thanks of the local Hindu Community for your able representation of their religion at the Parliament of Religions that met at Chicago in September 1893.

"The trouble and sacrifice you have incurred by your visit to America as a representative of the Hindu Religion are profoundly appreciated by all whom you have done the honour to represent. But their special acknowledgments are due to you for the services you have rendered to the cause they hold so dear, their sacred Arya Dharma, by your speeches and your ready responses to the questions of inquirers. No exposition of the general principles of the Hindu Religion could, within the limits of a lecture, be more accurate and lucid than what you gave in your address to the Parliament of Religions on Tuesday, the nineteenth September, 1893. And your subsequent utterances on the same subject on other occasions have been equally clear and precise. It has been the misfortune of Hindus to have their religion misunderstood and misrepresented through ages, and therefore they cannot but feel specially grateful to one of them who has had the courage and the ability to speak the truth about it and dispel illusions, among a strange people, in a strange land, professing a different religion. Their thanks are due no less to the audiences and the organisers of the meetings, who have received you kindly, given you opportunities for speaking, encouraged you in your work, and heard you in a patient and charitable spirit. Hinduism has, for the first time in its history, found a Missionary, and by a rare good fortune it has found one so able and accomplished as yourself. Your fellow-countrymen, fellow-citizens and fellow-Hindus feel that they would be wanting in an obvious duty if they did not convey to you their hearty sympathy and earnest gratitude for all your labours in spreading a true knowledge of their ancient faith. May God grant you strength and energy to carry on the good work you have begun !"

"Yours faithfully,
(Sd.) Peary Mohun Mookherjee,
Chairman."

Koviloor Digital Library

The first of these three Resolutions was moved by Babu Norendra Nath Sen and seconded by Rai Sheo Bux Bogla Bahadur, and supported by Kumar Radha Prosad Roy and Rai Jotindra Nath Chowdhury. The second Resolution was moved by Mr. N. N. Ghose, and seconded by Babu Khettra Nath Mullick and supported by Babu Kali Nath Mittra, the Hon'ble Surendra Nath Banerjee and Pundit Bhudeb Kabiratna. The third Resolution was moved by Babu Saligram Singh and seconded by Babu Amarendra Nath Chatterjee and supported by Babu Hemendra Nath Mittra, Babu Manoranjan Guha and Jotindra Lal Mittra. The following are extracts from the different speeches. On taking the chair Raja Peary Mohun Mookherjee said :—

"We are assembled here this evening to express our thankfulness, not to one who has distinguished himself by his meritorious services to the State, or to one who has won the reputation or triumphs of statesmanship; but we assemble in this grand meeting to express our high sense of appreciation and deep gratitude to a simple Sannyâsin, only thirty years old, who has been expounding the truths of our religion to the great American people with an ability, tact and judgment, (Cheers) which have elicited the highest admiration. Brother Vivekananda has opened the eyes of an important section of the civilised world by explaining the great truths of the Hindu religion, and convinced them that the most valuable products of human thought in the region of philosophy and religion, are to be found not in Western science and literature but in our ancient Shastras. (Cheers) I am very glad to find so large and influential a gathering to do honour to such a distinguished benefactor of our country. * * * * * * * *"

Babu Norendra Nath Sen spoke in part as follows :—

"The present meeting is one which is unique of its kind in this city, as we have met here to honour not a high state functionary, as we usually do, but a Hindu ascetic, who, by crossing the ocean, has done so much to further the cause of Hinduism by his eloquence and learning. And not only this ; but he, whose services we have come here to acknowledge, is only a youth scarcely, as I understand, thirty years of age. He must be a wonderful man who, at such an age, could command so overpowering a personality as to dazzle and electrify the most forward people of the day. It is said that facts are stranger than fiction. To my mind, some of the events that are occurring at the present moment far exceed in strangeness the stories supplied by the most vivid imagination of the

Kovilpoor Digital Library

novelist ; and I am very much inclined to ask in astonishment—'Are we living in a dream-land ?' For how else can we account for the phenomenal success of Swami Vivekananda's visit to the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and of his subsequent work in the United States ? Such success has given almost a new lease of life to the Hindus as a nation. It has been a brilliant gleam of light in the dark pages of the contemporary history of the Hindus, and has buoyed them up with hope, such as they never experienced before. Circumstances had, for sometime, gone so badly with us that we were driven almost to despair until the triumph, which has been attending the cause of Hinduism in America, through the efforts of a gifted Hindu, relumed our darkened spirits, and fed them with expectant longings. * * * * * It is not every day that we meet with such a man as Swami Vivekananda. He has been born to play an important part in the history of this country. His natural gifts are extraordinary. His large, lustrous eyes, like orbs of fire, shoot forth rays of life and light, and knowledge and power. * * *

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Swami Vivekananda's services to this country ; and we should not have deserved to be called Hindus, if we had failed to gather here this evening to testify our respect and gratitude to him. Though Calcutta has been behind the towns of Madras, Bangalore and Kumbhakonum in holding this meeting, yet to the credit of our city it must be said that it was here that the idea of voting an address of thanks both to the Swami and the American people originated ; * * * The Hindus have forgotten all sectional differences, and united in honouring the great Hindu messenger to the West. The spectacle in itself is a most interesting one. It is evident, national life is springing up everywhere ; and nobody can say now that the Hindus are a dead or inert nation, for certainly a nation which can produce a Vivekananda, who imparts a new turn o thought to a people in the forefront of modern civilisation, must yet have much vigorous life before it. * * * The Swami's visit, therefore, to America, was a most seasonable one. We are living in stirring times, and are unable, perhaps, to realise fully what is passing around us. To me it seems that the union between the East and the West, however Utopian the idea may look to many, is now only a question of time. Much stranger things than those we have already experienced, are not unlikely yet to happen. We have only to follow Swami Vivekananda's example, and our country is sure to progress and prosper as it never progressed and prospered before. Work, work, work should be the motto of every Hindu who has got the true interest of his country at heart, that is, work as unselfish, devoted and earnest as that of the truly patriotic Swami. Work is always sure to bring its own reward."

Rai Jatindra Nath Chowdhury said in the course of his

Koviloor Digital Library

address, that it had been told in some quarter that Hinduism was not fully represented at the Parliament, but he thought that a meeting of the kind held in Calcutta would give the lie direct to the statement like the above. In proposing he second Resolution, Mr. N. N. Ghose said in part :—

"From the days of Socrates downwards, the instances have been numerous of great teachers, whose teaching has not only not been appreciated by their contemporaries, but has been positively despised, resented and rebelled against, and has led to their persecution. Two factors, therefore, must always contribute to success, namely, first, the intrinsic value of the work, and second, the due appreciation of it by those to whom it is offered. No success could be more sudden or brilliant than Vivekananda's. Indeed, there is hardly anything more striking in the history of oratorical achievements. There was a Hindu monk, unknown to fame, addressing, in semi-Oriental costume, an assembly, the majority of whom could hardly pronounce his name, upon a subject removed, as far as possible, from their thoughts, and securing at once their applause and esteem. The merits of the speaker and the performance must have been great and surprising. But let us not forget that credit is at least equally due to those who appreciated him, encouraged him, found opportunities for his speaking, and gave him a patient and kind hearing. Vivekananda had gone to expound the principles of Hinduism, and if a people, professing a different religion, had received him with coldness, raised difficulties, technical or other, in the way of his speaking, and generally shown him disfavour, their conduct might have been excused as being under the circumstances only natural. But very different was the treatment they actually gave him. I am informed that the delegates had, as a rule, been invited. Vivekananda had not been invited, and therefore it would have been a very easy thing to exclude him on technical grounds from speaking at the Parliament. But Dr. Barrows, by a special act of kindness, waived all technical objections, introduced him to the audience, and permitted him to speak. Vivekananda did not say altogether fine and smooth things about Christianity, but gave occasionally hard knocks. His audience, at any rate, the American section of it, nevertheless gave him an indulgent hearing, and were warm in their acknowledgment of his merits. * * * * * Vivekananda spoke with a lucidity, a grace and a logical power which astonished and charmed his audience ; but I am not sure, whom to admire more, the speaker for his magnificent feat or the American people for their quick insight and ready appreciation. A triumph, more signal and more sudden, has scarcely been known in history. None of the great religious Teachers of the world, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mahomet or Confucius made con-

Kovilom Digital Library

verts by the hundreds by a first attempt. But this Hindu preacher, this orange monk, as he has been called, dispelled, by one effort, some of the illusions of ages from the minds of hundreds of people and roused them to a sense of the truths of a religion, which they had either never heard of, or must have always despised. And this is an age, not particularly distinguished for religious spirit. Vivekananda has been, however, you must remember, no single-speech Hamilton. His speech at the Parliament of Religions brought him into notice, but his work did not end there. In political slang, he has been often 'heckled', and his answers to the questions of inquirers have been quick and effective. He has been invited to address many meetings and appears to have invariably justified expectations. Indeed, he seems to be a general favourite and he finds it difficult to meet all the engagements that are thrust on him. * * *

"Vivekananda's achievements in America, remarkable as they have been, I regard however, rather as promises than as performances. His real work will have to be done in India. The redemption of India, I feel persuaded, lies not through her politics, but through her religion. Politics are in this country a superficial garb, put off and put on at pleasure. They sit loosely on the people. Religion is vital and essential, and inherited with their blood. It reaches the inmost depths of their nature, touches the marrow of their bones. This meeting is only a small testimony to its reality in this town. It has been organised by men, unused to the arts of agitation. Most of the active workers have been Sannyâsins who go about barefooted, in characteristic yellow costume. If they had only known how to employ the machinery, customarily used for getting up political demonstrations, the meeting, large as it is, might have been ten times larger. * * * It must be a matter of satisfaction and pride to all Hindus that gleams of a new light have made themselves visible, that their religion, after having remained under a cloud for centuries in the eyes of other nations, is just beginning to merge from its gloom. That the Americans, by no means a godless people, or a people lukewarm in their belief, or a people professing a faith akin to Hinduism, have been able quickly to seize some of its salient points, is a good augury. There is reason to hope that the light that has dawned will spread. * * * * An ancient Roman poet has said : —'Conquered Greece conquered her conquerors.' That is, the literature and philosophy, the arts and science of Greece extorted the admiration of the Romans and proved to them the instruments of a higher education. Let us hope that conquered India may conquer her conquerors, not of course by steel and gunpowder ; * * * * Let us hope that not only the race to whose care we are committed, but the entire human race may some day draw some of its spiritual inspiration from the ancient religion of this land, that the East and the West may thus make their full contribution to the perfection of humanity, and

Koyiloor Digital Library

that the last civilisation of the world, like her first, may be a civilisation, not of struggle and warfare, but of peace, sympathy, charity and harmonious co-operation to a great end."

Babu Kshettra Nath Mullick, after pointing out the noble qualities of the American nation, which by its unequalled assiduity, enterprise and devotion to work had made giant strides in all branches of material and moral advancement, said :—

" 'The reasons why the lectures of the Swami Vivekananda were heard and appreciated, have been given by Mr. Snell, President of the Scientific Section of the Parliament of Religions, and I cannot do better than quote from his letter to the *Pioneer* (the foremost Anglo-Indian journal) what those are.

" 'As intense is the astonished admiration which the personal presence and bearing and language of Paramahamsa Vivekananda have wrung from a public accustomed to think of Hindus—thanks to the fables and half-truths of the missionaries—as ignorant and degraded *heathen*, there is no doubt that the continued interest is largely due to a genuine hunger for the spiritual truths which India through him has proffered to the American people.

" 'America is starving for spiritual nourishment. In spite of its absorption in material things, in spite of the ignorance and provincialism of its upper classes and the savagery of its lower, there are many souls scattered everywhere throughout its great population who are thirsting for higher things. Europe has always been indebted to India for its spiritual inspirations. There is little, very little, of high thought and aspiration in Christendom which cannot be traced to one or another of the successive influxes of Hindu ideas: either to the Hinduised Hellenism of Pythagoras and Plato, to the Hinduised Mazdeism of the Gnostics, to the Hinduised Judaism of the Cabbalists, or to the Hinduised Mohammedanism of the Moorish philosophers, to say nothing of the Hinduised Occultism of the Theosophists, the Hinduised Socinianism of the new England transcendentalists, and the many other new streams of orientalising influence which are fertilising the soil of contemporary Christendom.

" 'The most illumined men and women, therefore, in Europe and America, have a natural drawing towards Hinduism, the chief historic source of their light and life, as soon as they are brought into close contact with it under circumstances at all favourable to its just appreciation. In the United States, particularly, there are several widespread and influential movements which are distinctly Hindu in their character and tendencies. Not only is all the scientific and liberal thought, monistic in its trend, but the so-called 'Christian Science' movement (most

Kovilour Digital Library

egregiously misnamed), is admittedly based upon the Vedanta Philosophy.

"'America is well sprinkled with Advaitins, of all three schools, even though they would not always, in the absence of any direct knowledge of Hindu thought, know how to define their position.

"'Even the Christian mythology is not so very different from the Hindu, and the latter is gradually becoming familiar to the American people, through the medium of translations, books and articles by scientists and dilettanti, and the writings and personal labours of Theosophists and some other liberal sects.

"'All the Hinduising forces hitherto at work have received a notable impulse from the labours of Swami Vivekananda. Never before has so authoritative a representative of genuine Hinduism—as opposed to the emasculated and Anglicised versions of it so common in these days—been accessible to American inquirers; and it is certain, beyond peradventure, that the American people at large will, when he is gone, look forward with eagerness to his return, or the advent of some of his *confrères* of the institute of Sankaracharya. * * *

"'America thanks India for sending him, and begs her to send many more like him, if such there are, to teach by their example those of her own children who have not yet learned the lessons of universal fraternity and openness of mind and heart; and by their precepts those who have not yet come to see Divinity in all things and a Oneness transcending all.'"

Babu Surendra Nath Banerjee, the well-known orator and veteran politician, said in part:—

"In those remote times the memory of which has faded away from human recollection, the religious convictions of my ancestors gave consolation to millions of men and in the days yet to come it will afford unbounded consolation to millions of human beings. Is it possible not to feel the deepest reverence, the most overpowering gratitude for the eloquent exponent of this noble and majestic religion of India to the people of the far West? I am sure, those who are assembled here on the platform of this hall, must accept the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. We may differ from him in some respects, but that matters very little. Who does not pour forth his gratitude to this illustrious man,—to his noble self-abnegation, his enthusiasm, the association in his character of the splendid genius, that adorns the Swami? We gather here to express our unanimous sense of gratitude to this illustrious individual. We are met together to perform a national act, and therefore I desire to express on my behalf my fervent sympathy with the noble object of the meeting, which has found utterance in the gathering of to-day. His life and glowing self-sacrifice should inspire the young men of our country.

Koviloor Digital Library

His lofty standard of morality, which is the secret of all success, should be cultivated by our countrymen, so that we may be prepared for that political redemption to which we are all anxiously looking forward."

Pundit Bhudeb Kabiratna addressed the meeting in Bengali, saying among other things:—

"* * * It is only those who like Swami Vivekananda soar high in the region of the clouds upon the bosom of the infinite heavens, those whose soul scorning the ground move about on the higher plane of spiritual truths, that can impart new life to our mother country. The Swami is standing on that height where the clouds do roar and India, the *châtak* (skylark), is filled with joy at the welcome sound, for the quenching of her thirst is now within a measurable distance of time. Would she have rejoiced if instead of teaching the Wisdom of Life, Vivekananda talked of politics, or discussed the commercial policy of the Government of India? If anything is a source of pride to the Hindu it is his religion, his philosophy of the Upanishads. * * *

"The soil of mother India is proverbially fertile, but we know not how to profit by it; the British capitalist comes in, puts it under the plough, sows indigo or tea or coffee, and makes himself a master of untold wealth. As in the material so in the spiritual world. Our religion and philosophy lie neglected by the sons of the soil, strangers cultivate those fields and reap harvests so rich that the world stands astonished. * * *"

Babu Amarendra Nath Chatterjee said that he was thankful to have this opportunity of honouring the young Hindu reformer, Swami Vivekananda, on whom, it appeared, as if the mantle of the Rishis had fallen to uphold and maintain and propagate the doctrines of the Hindu faith in foreign lands. He, the speaker, trusted that the effect of the triumph of the Hindu teacher in America would lead to permanent results in reviving the religious enthusiasm of the Hindus, in remodelling the educational system in India in which religious and moral culture formed no part, and, above all, in harmonising the ancient religion with the ideas of an ever-advancing civilisation by adapting it to the circumstances of the times.

Babu Hemendra Nath Mittra, in the course of supporting the Resolution, said :—

"* * * Speaking in a meeting, specially convened for the purpose of expressing our deep sense of gratitude to, and appreciation of the

Koviloor Digital Library

services of Swami Vivekananda, one cannot help recalling to his mind his august and venerable preceptor and Guru, the Lord Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Deva. Born in the petty village of Kamarpookur in the district of Hughly, he fixed as his place of *sádhaná*, the root of that tree, ever to be associated with the sacred name of Mahadeva, the *Bilva* tree, and a grove of trees, well-known as the *Panchavati* in the *Kalibati* at Dakshineswar. There in the eternal longing of a soul that pants for truth and higher spirituality, enshrined within the majesty of his own self, shutting up, as it were, the five organs of our material senses, after the right Oriental fashion, he made Self, and Self alone, his study, his contemplation. Unlike the modern scientists of the day, who seek in vain to evolve spiritual truths from material ones, he recognised the ancient principle that a perfect spiritual knowledge could be attained only by the Spirit, and through the Spirit. And so centring his whole inner consciousness in his inner self, he directed the same towards the attainment of *Brahmajnána*, till grade after grade, step by step, that became an accomplished fact. Then became manifest that splendid fire, one spark of which has set ablaze a whole continent, and enlightened the very life and thought of the most advanced and the most civilised portion of the globe. For, were it not for the higher spiritual force, infused in him by his Guru, think you that Swami Vivekananda could have achieved what he did? Others with a so-called better education, with a so-called higher training, visited the continent on missionary tour, but it was reserved for Swami Vivekananda alone to impress the foremost scientists of the day with the majesty and beauty of our ancient Aryan teachings. The reason is obvious, and not far to seek. The great Master breathed into his ear the sacred word, and infused in him a spirituality which cultivated and developed as it was in his case, and moulded daily by the muttering of his *Dikshá-mantra*, fitted him for the great and arduous task he was destined to perform. For, in his case, the *Mantra* came from a *Mukta-purusha*, from one who knew the key-note of the life he was to mould and develop harmoniously. What wonder, then, that Swami Vivekananda should make his voice heard whenever and wherever it is sounded!

"To the Swami, perhaps, any word of approbation or thanksgiving that we may offer to give expression to, is of absolutely no value, for has he not attained that height where the voice of praise and censure reaches not. But absorbed and engrossed as we are with a thousand and one longings and yearnings, we fail to realise that truth, and feel very great pleasure in doing what we have met here this evening to do. * * * "

Babu Manoranjan Guha who spoke in Bengali, after dwelling on the inestimable good, both spiritual and temporal,

Kovilloor Digital Library

that the work of the Swami in the West was sure to bring forth, said :—

"* * * Before closing I think it my duty to pronounce the hallowed name of Vivekananda's Great Master, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the root of that majestic plant out of which Vivekananda has come forth as a splendid flower. Paramahamsa Deva was the living Impersonation of the Catholic Spirit of Hinduism. Now, if the disciple is great it is because the Master is greater. And need I add that in rendering thanks to the disciple for the good work that he has been doing, we are at the same time offering our humble tribute of honour and reverence, to that Great Master who has made the existence of men like Vivekananda possible in this nineteenth century. * * * "

The Chairman then read before the assembly the letters from the leading orthodox members of the Hindu community, who were prevented from being present, from one of which an extract is quoted here as voicing the spirit of the others. Babu Ishan Chandra Mookherjee, in a letter addressed to Pandit Raj Kumar Nyayaratna and others, writes :—

"* * * Nothing in this age of progress and enlightenment has been so much misunderstood and misrepresented by foreigners pretending to understand it, as Hinduism; Swami Vivekananda has succeeded in dispersing the mist that gathered round this subject and placing it in a proper light before the American public. As it is not unlikely that men whose interest it is to disparage and disrate Hinduism may endeavour to make people believe that the Hinduism expounded by Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago is not the Hinduism of the Shastras, it behoves us as Hindus to lose no time in offering our congratulations to our distinguished countryman for his successful representation of our Religion and thus practically declaring to the world that in expounding Hinduism in the way he has done, he has only echoed our sentiments and those of our Shastras. * * * "

These addresses convey some idea of that great wave of spiritual enthusiasm which swept the entire audience at the meeting. It was as if the Spirit of the Sanatana Dharma, the Spirit of Hinduism itself were there as a great overshadowing influence of peace and insight and benediction. The addresses were punctuated with repeated applause, and in that hour Hinduism was gloriously self-conscious and spiritually aggressive, proud of its contents and of its form through the

Koviloor Digital Library

thrilling and electrifying utterances of the speakers and the cheering response they evoked. And in Madras and in Bangalore the meetings had been similar in character. The name, Vivekananda, rang with acclaim throughout the length and breadth of Hindusthan, so that the fame of the Swami was spread broadcast as much in the land of his birth as in America, and everywhere he was recognised as a Great Acharya, the Man who had come to fill a NEED. Truly, in these days he was lifted, head and shoulders, like a great Soul of Hinduism, above the greatness of India itself; for he had become the spokesman and the mouthpiece of Hinduism and had been acknowledged as such by India as a whole. The lethargic and somnolent state to which the spirit of Hinduism was sinking was by him veritably rehabilitated; and in these meetings one already heard the footsteps of that approaching dawn when India, as of old, shall become gloriously self-conscious and supremely powerful, when conquered India shall conquer her conquerors, even as the learning and civilisation of Greece conquered the crude and unlettered spirit of Rome, not by warfare and streams of blood but by the infinitely more powerful force of the incomparable Vedas and the Vedanta.

And already one sees, in the character of these meetings, the prophecy of that which was to come as the result of the triumphal tour and the soul-stirring utterances which the Swami made on his return from the great and powerful West to the *Punyabhumi*, the holy land of Aryavarta, travelling from Colombo to Almora.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXIII.

THE BEGINNING OF WORK.

It is an exceedingly difficult task to keep up with the Swami's travels following upon the Parliament of Religions until he finally settled down to his New York work. On his lecture tour under the management of the bureau his travels were many and wide; and following upon that, the tours he made delivering lectures and holding parlour meetings and class talks on his own account, were even more varied. Within the short time of a year he had visited practically every city of consequence from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River, and had given innumerable lectures, both public and private, the reports of most of which are unfortunately not available now. Wherever he went, he went as a guest. In Detroit he was for about four weeks the guest of Mrs. John J. Bagley, the widow of the ex-Governor of Michigan and a lady of rare culture and unusual spirituality. She often said that during this time the Swami constantly expressed the highest in word and action, and that his presence was a "continual benediction." After leaving Mrs. Bagley, he spent two weeks as the guest of the Hon. Thomas W. Palmer, the President of the World's Fair Commission and formerly a U. S. Senator and the Minister of his country to Spain. When not travelling, or answering invitations coming from far and near, he was frequently the guest of Mr. George W. Hale of Chicago. After giving a series of lectures in the Unitarian Church at Detroit in February, the Swami spent the months of March, April and May of 1894, alternately in Chicago, and New York and Boston. June he spent in Chicago, while during the mid-summer months he delivered a series of lectures at Greenacre in New England, where the "Greenacre Conferences" were being inaugurated and before which he had been asked to speak. Here a group of earnest students

Koviloor Digital Library

gathered round him, and the Swami expounded the Vedanta philosophy to them, whilst they sat in oriental fashion, under a venerable Pine tree, since associated with his name, it being called "The Swami's Pine." These conferences became widely known through the school of Comparative Religions conducted there by the late Dr. Lewis G. Janes, who was long the gifted and liberal-minded President of the Brooklyn Ethical Association. Following upon his work in Greenacre, where he left an indelible impression, the Swami visited on invitation various intellectual and society people in the cities and suburbs of Boston, Chicago and New York. In this way he spent the autumn, visiting Baltimore and Washington at the end of October. In November he came to New York again from Boston. His previous visits to New York, beginning from the early part of the year, had been only casual, as it were, the Swami living as a guest in the homes of friends. He gave a few public lectures but was not yet in a position to begin regular work. At a lecture given in the parlour of a friend he chanced to meet Dr. Lewis G. Janes, mentioned above, who was so much struck with his unusual attainments as well as with his message that he invited him at once to give a series of lectures on the Hindu Religion before the Brooklyn Ethical Association. This the Swami accepted. Since that time he and Dr. Janes became fast friends, until death separated them.

His first lecture in Brooklyn before that Association ensured him immediate success. A large and enthusiastic audience greeted him on that night,—the last night of the year,—to listen to his lecture on Hinduism, "and as the Swami, in his long robe and turban, expounded the ancient religion of his native land, the interest grew so deep that at the close of the evening there was an insistent demand for regular classes in Brooklyn." The Swami graciously acceded, and a series of class meetings was held and several public lectures were given at the Pouch Mansion, where the Ethical Association held its meetings, and elsewhere.

Of his appearance before the Brooklyn Ethical Society, *The Brooklyn Standard* wrote :—

Koviloor Digital Library

"It was the voice of the ancient Rishis of the Vedas, speaking sweet words of love and toleration through the Hindu monk, Paramahamsa Swami Vivekananda, that held spell-bound every one of those many hundreds who had accepted the invitation of the Brooklyn Ethical Society and packed the large lecture hall and the adjoining rooms of the Pouch Gallery on Clinton Avenue to overflowing, on the thirty-first December, 1894.

"The fame of the Oriental ascetic, who came to this Western world as the emissary and representative of the most ancient form of philosophical religious worship, Hinduism, had preceded him and as a result, men of all professions and callings—doctors and lawyers and judges and teachers—together with many ladies, had come from all parts of the city to listen to his strangely beautiful and eloquent defence of the Religion of India. They had heard of him as the delegate of the worshippers of Krishna and Brahma and Buddha to the '*Parliament of Religions*' at the World's Fair in Chicago, where he had been the most honoured of all pagan representatives ; they had read of him as the philosopher who, for the sake of his religion, had given up what promised to be a most brilliant career, who, by years of ardent and patient study, had taken the scientific culture of the West and had transplanted it to the mystic soil of the ancient tradition of the Hindus ; they had heard of his culture and his learning, of his wit and his eloquence, of his purity and sincerity and holiness, and hence they expected great things.

"And they were not disappointed. Swami (i. e., Master or Rabbi or Teacher) Vivekananda is even greater than his fame. As he stood upon the *dais* in his picturesque kaftan of bright red, a stray curl of jet-black hair creeping from under the many folds of his orange turban, his swarthy face reflecting the brilliancy of his thoughts, his large expressive eyes, bright with the enthusiasm of a prophet, and his mobile mouth uttering, in deep melodious tones and in almost perfect English, only words of love and sympathy and toleration ; he was a splendid type of the famous sages of the Himalayas, a prophet of a new religion combining the morality of the Christians with the philosophy of the Buddhists; and his hearers understood why on Sept. 5, 1894, a crowded mass meeting at Calcutta was held for the sole purpose of 'publicly recording the grateful appreciation of his countrymen for his great services rendered to the cause of Hinduism.'

"Whatever else may be said of the Swami's lecture or address (for it was spoken extemporaneously), it was certainly intensely interesting. * *

"The speaker was frequently and heartily applauded. At the end of his lecture he devoted some fifteen minutes to answering questions; after which he held an informal reception."

This series of lectures constituted the real beginning of

Kovilpur Digital Library

the Swami's work. He had already anticipated the serious character of his future activity by breaking himself loose from personal and public invitations and establishing himself at this time in quarters of his own in the city of New York. He was tired and disgusted with the fame he had acquired; and he felt that the interest he had awakened was not what he wanted; to his mind it was too superficial. He desired earnest-minded followers whom he could teach freely, while living independently in a place of his own. For this reason he announced classes and lectures free of charge, himself sustaining the burden of the expense by the money he had gained in the course of his lecturing tours. Many came, some from curiosity, others from earnest sincerity "to learn the ancient teachings of India and the all embracing character of its philosophy,.....and, above all, to hear the constant lessons of the Swami on a world-wide universal toleration." Miss S. E. Waldo, of Brooklyn, who became one of the Swami's foremost disciples, and is known under the name of Sister Haridasi, writes as follows, taking up the thread of her narrative from the time of his lecture before the Ethical Association :—

"A few of those who had heard him in Brooklyn now began to go to the place where he lived in New York. It was just an ordinary room on the second floor of a lodging house. The classes grew with astonishing rapidity and as the little room filled to overflowing it became very picturesque. The Swami himself sat on the floor and most of his audience likewise. The marble-topped dresser, the arms of the sofa and even the corner washstand helped to furnish seats for the constantly increasing numbers. The door was left open and the overflow filled the hall and sat on the stairs. And those first classes! How intensely interesting they were! Who that was privileged to attend them can ever forget them? The Swami so dignified yet so simple, so gravely earnest, so eloquent, and the close ranks of students, forgetting all inconveniences, hanging breathless on his every word!

"It was a fit beginning for a movement that has since grown to such grand proportions. In this unpretentious way did Swami Vivekananda inaugurate the work of teaching Vedanta philosophy in New York. The Swami gave his services free as air. The rent was paid by voluntary subscriptions, and when these were found insufficient, the Swami hired

Kovilloor Digital Library

a hall and gave secular lectures on India and devoted the proceeds to the maintenance of the classes. He said that Hindu teachers of religion felt it to be their duty to support their classes and the students, too, if they were unable to care for themselves, and the teachers would willingly make any sacrifice they possibly could to assist a needy disciple.

"The classes began in February, 1895, and lasted until June; but long before that time they had outgrown their small beginnings and had removed downstairs to occupy an entire parlour floor and extension. The classes were held nearly every morning and on several evenings in each week. Some Sunday lectures were also given, and there were 'question' classes to help those to whom the teaching was so new and strange that they were desirous to have an opportunity for more extended explanation."

It is touching to find the Swami teaching Americans of wealth and position, in the fashion of the ancient *Gurus*. Though they had money, he would not make a single charge. Religion, to his mind, ought to be given free, for religion is something not to be bartered but realised. Though it is true that regular classes did not begin until February of the year 1895, yet numbers upon numbers of visitors flocked to him constantly, some treating him with great personal reverence, others, again, scrutinising him and his theories, while still others were newspaper reporters and editors of magazines, bent on spreading his name and his teachings before the public. The Swami now felt that he was carrying on his message, slowly, perhaps, but surely, on a right footing. Formerly he had stood merely in the lime-light of public attention; and a superficial-minded person might have felt that that was success. But the Swami knew better, for he had within him the Sannyâsin instinct for sounding the reality and worth of things. Others in his position might never have ventured to break with the lecture bureau and lose financially, nor would they have abandoned readily the surroundings and the invitations of persons of wealth and social position for the simple and yet intense life which he had decided to take up for the spreading of the cause and for the sake of true, genuine work. But with the Swami, the soul of things was deep. He trusted in Truth and in God, and he felt that he was being guided.

Koviloor Digital Library

At this time he worked more strenuously than ever; he gave his whole time to teaching by means of talks and lectures, and regularly each day trained some chosen followers how to practise quietude of mind in the silence of meditation. Indeed, it was truly said that in the midst of his intense activity he had the meditation-habit. Teaching his auditors how to meditate he would himself drift into the meditative state, and oftentimes so deep would he sink the plummet of personality into the abyss of spiritual introspection that he could not readily be brought back to normal consciousness; and those who were his students would rise from the class and steal quietly away. When the Swami came forth from such states he would feel impatient with himself, for he desired that the Teacher more than the Yogi should be uppermost in him, and therefore he tried hard not to risk such repetitions. While meditating privately with one or two, he would give a word or a Name by which he could be recalled, should his personality be carried by the force of meditation into the region of Samâdhi. Oftentimes he might be found singing some Sanskrit hymns in gentle tones, or murmuring to himself some of the great *slokas* of the Vedas and the Upanishads. He literally radiated spirituality. Indeed, that same atmosphere of ecstasy and insight that hovered about the Master and Dakshineswar, now hovered about the Swami in these strange surroundings in a far off land. An atmosphere of benediction, of peace, of power and of inexpressible luminosity was felt by one and all who came to his classes. He rejoiced now that he was more the monk, as of old, more the true teacher, the *guru*, to souls that sought his grace. And yet in spite of these meditative moods he was always on the *qui vive* with reference to the preaching of his philosophy and the defending of the civilisation of his land, in public lectures and when questions were asked and discussion arose. A well-known writer describing his personality at this period, has said :—

"Those who have met him and heard him speak, will remember his fascinating personality, this fine intelligent face beaming with celestial

Kovilour Digital Library

radiance mingled with the innocent smile of a child, his deep musical voice, his uncommon eloquence, and above all, his wonderful oratorical powers which drew from the hearts of his appreciative listeners the exclamation that he was an orator by divine right."

However great his efforts were to withdraw from the public gaze since his final return to New York, there were constantly notices of his teaching and of his personality published in the papers. Amongst others, *The New York Critique* thus reported about the Swami at this time :—

"He has preached in clubs and churches until his faith has become familiar to us. * * * His culture, his eloquence and his fascinating personality have given us a new idea of Hindu Civilisation. * * * His fine, intelligent face and his deep musical voice, prepossesses one at once in his favour. * * * He speaks without notes, presenting his facts and his conclusions with the greatest art and the most convincing sincerity, and rising often to rich inspiring eloquence."

It is interesting to read the description of the Swami given by the Phrenological Journal of New York. It reads :—

"Swami Vivekananda is in many respects an excellent specimen of his race. He is five feet eight and a half inches in height and weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. His head measures twenty-one and three-fourths inches in circumference by fourteen from ear to ear across the top. He is thus very well proportioned as regards both body and brain. He will be able to make his home wherever he can find agreeable employment for his intellectual powers, and such friendship as he manifests is chiefly the expression of gratitude for encouragement and appreciation of his missionary work. His instincts are too feminine to be compatible with much conjugal sentiment. Indeed, he says himself that he never had the slightest feeling of love for any woman. As he is opposed to war and teaches a religion of unmixed gentleness, we should expect his head to be narrow in the region of the ears at the seat of combativeness and destructiveness, and such is the case. The same deficiency is much marked in the diameters a little farther up at secretiveness and acquisitiveness. He dismisses the whole subject of finance and ownership by saying that he has no property and does not want to be bothered with any. While such a sentiment sounds odd to American ears, it must be confessed that his face, at least, shows more marks of contentment than the visages of Russel Sage, Hetty Green and many others of our multi-millionaires. Firmness and conscientiousness are fully developed. Benevolence is quite conspicuous. Music is well indicated in the width

Kovilpur Digital Library

of the temples. The prominent eyes betoken superior memory of words and explain much of the eloquence he has displayed in his lectures. The upper forehead is well developed at causality and in comparison to which is added a fine endowment of suavity and sense of human nature. Summing up the organisation, it will be seen that kindness, sympathy and philosophical intelligence, with ambition to achieve success in the direction of higher educational work are his predominant characteristics. Being a graduate of the Calcutta University, he speaks English almost as perfectly as if he were a native of England. If he does no more than continue the development of that splendid spirit of charity which was displayed at the World's Fair, his mission among us will certainly prove eminently successful."

Thus, though there was much appreciation of the beauty of his character and the grandeur of his mission and teaching, yet it is not to be supposed that the path before the Swami was all smooth sailing. With his great veneration for Jesus the Christ, which all who knew him saw in him, it is almost unbelievable to find that the Swami was continuously persecuted by sectarian and bigoted Christians. Indeed, they went far beyond the limits of legitimate criticism of his work and his philosophy and even made personal attacks upon his character. These detractors several times addressed notes and letters to persons who had invited him as their guest, stating that the Swami was not what he represented himself to be, and circulating all sorts of calumnies against him. Occasionally these notices had their evil effects, and the Swami about to accept such invitations, would find that the houses of his intended hosts were closed to him! But in most instances, the latter would discover their error after a time, coming to know that he had been most maliciously slandered; and then they would call upon him and apologise and become his friends and admirers.

A certain loftiness of spirit characterised by non-attachment to the fruits of work was always manifest in the Swami; he had no personal or selfish ambitions. In concordance with the natural bent of his character, when Henry J. Van Haagen, an ardent disciple, expressed surprise to him that his teachings had not even a larger following, he said in reply "I could have thousands more at my lectures if I wanted them. It is the

Kovilpur Digital Library

sincere student who will help to make this work a success and not merely large audiences. If I succeed in my life in helping one man to reach freedom, I shall feel that my labours have not been in vain, but quite successful." And in all his classes, the strong impression that their beloved teacher gave to his students was to make them feel as if he were addressing each one of them, as if each one alone engaged his entire attention and sympathy, and as if he was ever ready to give himself away to help the humblest of them. This pleasing attitude created that wonderful feeling of response and genuine devotion which so many of his students felt for him, and made that bond between himself and them fast and enduring, which is so essential for any teacher's or disciple's real success.

Amidst all his energetic and enthusiastic work and conflicting experience the Swami held India constantly in mind. Yes, he did not only support his American work but help India also in so far as was possible. And this help he freely gave, irrespective of sect or creed. As an instance, he had given over the proceeds of his lecture on "The Ideals of Hindu Women," delivered before the Ethical Association of Brooklyn, to its President, to be forwarded by him to Babu Sashipada Bannerjee's Baranagore Boarding School for Hindu Widows. In forwarding the proceeds Dr. Lewis G. Janes wrote to Sashipada Babu as follows:—

"This sum constitutes the proceeds of a lecture before our Association by your able countryman, the Swami Vivekananda, who has spoken for us several times before large audiences and created great interest in the Vedanta philosophy and also on the social and political conditions in India. In justice to the Swami I should say that the proposition to give a benefit lecture for your school was his own voluntary idea with which we were delighted to co-operate."

This action on the part of the Swami showed his great sense of toleration and his true patriotism, for the school in question was a Brahmo institution. Brahmo or Hindu, Mussulman or Arya Samajist, the Swami saw in all the modern societies and ancient institutions in India channels for the resurrection and impregnable consolidation of the

Koviloor Digital Library

Indian consciousness. In all things the Swami was an Indian, but he was also more than an Indian; he was truly cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world, as all true Rishis are seeing the Oneness of the Spirit and labouring constantly for its fuller and more glorious manifestation.

It must be remembered that the Swami's life in America was by no means easy. If he had practised austerities in India, he, in one sense, underwent them in America doubly so. His life itself was *Sadhana*. The obstacles he met with were enormous; he was constantly on the edge, as one says. He found everywhere the unconscious opposition of ignorance. Nothing presents so truly and vividly the story of the Swami's difficulties and of his successes than a letter written to "The Brahmavâdin" in the following year by the Swami Kripânanda, an American disciple, which is quoted at length here to show what mettle the Swami was composed of:—

"The wonderful success which the Swami Vivekananda achieved in spreading the religious and the philosophical ideas of the Hindus in America, may lead one to the erroneous conclusion that this happy result was due to a coincidence of favourable circumstances, rather than to his extraordinary ability. It is only by studying the *fin de siècle* condition of our country, by taking cognisance of the antagonistic forces that had to be coped with, and considering the numerous difficulties to be overcome in this attempt, that we come to fully appreciate the grandeur of the work accomplished, and to realise that the great success accompanying it, is solely due to the personality of the Teacher, to his extraordinary moral, intellectual and spiritual endowments, and to his exceptional energy and will-power.

"It is true that, on the occasion of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, many Indians succeeded in calling the attention of the world to the Light from the East, and caused a wave to pass over our country; but this wave would have died away as quickly as it had come, without leaving any lasting effect, had it not been for the efforts of this one man who unremittingly persisted in grafting the Hindu religious ideas on the Western materialism and never rested until his work was crowned with success.

"At the time the American mind was coated with thick layers of superstition and bigotry that had come down from the olden times and there was no humbug, no charlatanry, no imposition which had not left

Koviloor Digital Library

there an impress extremely difficult to eradicate. The Americans are a receptive nation. That is why the country is a hotbed of all kinds of religious and irreligious monstrosities that ever sprang from a human brain. There is no theory so absurd, no doctrine so irrational, no claim so extravagant, no fraud so transparent, but can find their numerous believers and a ready market. This morbid craving for the abnormal, the occult, the sensational, has practically brought about a revival of the Middle Ages. To satisfy this craving, to feed the credulity of the people hundreds of societies and sects took birth for the salvation of the world and pocket $25 to $100 as initiation fee from those ready to pay it. The whole atmosphere was filled in some places with hobgoblins, spooks and Mahatmas and new prophets were rising every day. In this bedlam of religious cranks of all shades and colours, in this devil's kitchen of fraud, imposture and knavery, the Swami appeared to teach the lofty religion f the Vedas, the profound philosophy of the Vedanta, the sublime wisdom of the ancient Rishis. The most unfavourable environment for such a task! Before even starting this great mission, it was necessary to first perform the Herculean labour of cleansing this Augean stable of imposture, superstition and bigotry, a task sufficient to discourage the bravest heart, to dispirit the most powerful will. But the Swami was not the man to be deterred by difficulties. Poor and friendless, with no other support than God and his love for mankind, he set patiently to work, determined not to give up until the message he had to deliver would find a receptacle in the hearts of truth-seeking men and women.

'In the beginning crowds of people flocked to his lectures. But they were not of the kind that a teacher of religion would be pleased to have for his auditors. They consisted partly of curiosity-seekers, partly of the representatives of the cranky and fraudulent elements mentioned before, who thought that they had found in the Swami a proper tool to forward their interests. Most of the latter type of persons tried to induce him to embrace their cause, first by promises of support, and then by threats of injuring him he refused to ally himself with them. But they were all grievously disappointed. For the first time they had met with a man who could be neither bought nor frightened,—'the sickle had hit on a stone', as the Polish proverb says. To all these propositions his only answer was, 'I stand for Truth. Truth will never ally itself with falsehood. Even if all the world should be against me, Truth must prevail in the end.' He denounced fraud and superstition in whatever guise they appeared, and all those untrue and erratic existences hid themselves, like bats at the approach of daylight, in their haunts before this apostle of Truth.

"The methods and tactics of the Christian Missionaries are well-

Koviloor Digital Library

known. They would have liked it ever so much to have the Swami preach Christianity as they understood it, but 'It could not, should not be', as runs the refrain of the German Folk's song. Indifferent to the filthy stories they set in circulation about him, he peacefully continued to preach God and Love and Truth, and their gossip had the only effect to advertise his lectures, and gain him the sympathy of all fair-minded people.

"A worthier antagonist, though not commensurate with his strength, he had to meet in another class of people, the so-called Freethinkers, embracing the atheists, materialists, agnostics, rationalists, and all those who, on principle, are averse to anything that savours of religion. They thought that this Hindu monk was an easy match for them, and that all his theology would be crushed under the weight of Western civilisation, Western philosophy, and Western science. So sure were they of their triumph, that they invited him, in New York, to lecture before their society, anxious to show to their numerous followers how easily religious claims could be refuted by the powerful arguments of their logic and pure reasoning. I shall never forget that memorable evening when the Swami accepted the challenge and appeared single-handed to face the matadores of materialism, all arrayed with their heaviest armour of law, and reason, and logic and common sense of matter, and force, and heredity, and all the stock phrases calculated to awe and terrify the ignorant mass. Imagine their surprise and consternation when they found that, far from being intimidated by these big words, he proved himself a master in wielding their own weapons, and as familiar with the arguments of materialism as with those of the Advaita philosophy. He showed them that their much-vaunted Western civilisation consisted principally in the development of the art to destroy their fellow-men, that their Western science could not answer the most vital questions of life and being, that their immutable laws, so much talked of, had no outside existence apart from the human mind, that the very idea of matter was a metaphysical conception, and that it was the much despised metaphysics upon which ultimately rested the very basis of their materialism. With an irresistible logic he demonstrated that their knowledge proved itself incorrect, not by comparison with knowledge which is true, but by the very laws upon which it depends for its basis; that pure reasoning could not help admitting its own limitations and pointed to something beyond reason; and that rationalism when carried to its last consequences must ultimately land us at a something which is above matter, above force, above sense, above thought and even consciousness, and of which all these are but manifestations.

"The powerful effect of this lecture could be seen on the following day, when numbers of the materialistic camp came to sit at the

Kovilpur Digital Library

feet of the Hindu monk, and listen to his sublime utterances on God and religion.

"Thus the Swami gathered around himself, from among the most heterogeneous classes of society a large and ever-increasing following of sincere men and women animated with the only desire to pursue truth for truth's own sake.

"This is a delineation of the negative side of the Swami's work. He had first to clear the ground and lay a deep foundation for the grand edifice to be built."

More and more, as time went on, the Swami found himself winning, to a greater and still greater extent, the confidence and the respect, and even the reverence, of large numbers of people in America. The American papers caught the note of ecstasy that had been heralded forth at the Calcutta Town-Hall meeting in his honour, and both East and West were vying for the more luminous presentation of his personality and teachings. As for himself the address which he received from the Hindu community at Calcutta gave him extraordinary encouragement, and he felt that the Lord was indeed back of his work, as the moving power. His prayers were that he might become the better and still more efficient exponent of the Dharma; and his confidence in his own mission grew greater and greater. As has been seen, he had by this time turned his attention from winning popular approval and had sought to train a few disciples and followers, moulding their lives for higher realisations with all the powers and the service that he could command. Seeing the innate genius of the Swami, many of those that came to him as earnest seekers devoted themselves heart and soul to be worthy of becoming his followers in a definite sense, and his classes grew accordingly both in number and in quality. His personal experiences at this time were multifarious; he was brought into contact with many of the most celebrated persons in America, but the greater the distinctions that were conferred on him, they only served to make him all the humbler and all the more devout. His replies to the various addresses sent to him from India and to the letters of his disciples, were filled with ardent patriotism and fiery spirit-

Koviloor Digital Library

uality, and from them it was evident that he intended to offer his whole life upon the altar of unintermittent service for India and the world. He would be consumed with work and service. Therefore he redoubled his efforts in his American labours, straining himself to the point of tension to circulate the ideas of the Hindu religion and philosophy.

His disciples in India were constantly looking up to him for guidance at this time, sending him numerous letters and even begging him to return to India ; but to all this his reply was that they should depend upon themselves, believe in themselves and "march on." The Swami invariably gave one the impression of having the strength of a military leader ; his letters charging and inciting them to work were always military in character and in intensity ; and his reprimands and words of encouragement were alike replete with martial enthusiasm. He had no patience with lack of self-confidence and his constant watchword was, "Stand on your own feet!" He wrote, "* * * if you are really my children you will fear nothing, stop at nothing. You will be like lions. We must rouse India and the whole world. * * *" All his letters to India at this time are filled with this spirit and with a remarkable penetration into the nature of Indian problems. His comments on Christianity, during this period are also interesting. In a letter he writes as follows, at the very time when agitation was being made against him by missionary bodies in America, and it is mentioned to show the great generosity and kindly spirit of the Swami :—

"* * * The Christianity that is preached in India is quite different from what one sees here ; you will be astonished to hear that I have friends in this country amongst the clergy of the Episcopal and even Presbyterian churches, who are as broad, as liberal and as sincere, as you are in your own religion. The real spiritual man is broad everywhere. His love forces him to be so. Those to whom religion is a trade, are forced to become narrow and mischievous by their introduction into religion of the competitive, fighting and selfish methods of the world."

When his Indian friends had sent to him the missionary criticism concerning himself and his work he answered :

Kovilpatti Digital Library

"• • • In future do not pay any heed to what people say either for or against me. • • * I shall work incessantly until I die, and even after death I shall work for the good of the world. Truth is infinitely more weighty than untruth ; • • • It is the force of character, of purity and of truth—of personality. So long as I have these things you can feel easy ; no one will be able to injure a hair of my head. If they try they will fail, sayeth the Lord. • * • "

Probably none others of the Swami's writings are so surcharged with the apostolic fire of his own personality as his letters, and particularly his letters written at this time to his *gurubhâis* and his Indian devotees. These abound with such fine utterances as the following taken at random :—

"• • • I do not care whether they are Hindus, or Mohammedans or Christians, but those that love the Lord will always command my service."

"Plunge into the fire and bring people towards the Lord. Everything will come to you if you have faith."

"I always pray for you ; you must pray for me. Let each one of us pray day and night for the down-trodden millions in India, who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny,—pray day and night for them. I care more to preach religion to them than to the high and the rich. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. I am poor, I love the poor.....who feels in India for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken for ever in poverty and ignorance? Where is the way out? Who feels for them? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them—Who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your God—Think of them, work for them, pray for them incessantly—the Lord will show you the way. Him I call a Mahâtman, whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise, he is a Durâtman.....We may die unknown, unpitied, unbewailed, without accomplishing anything,—but not one thought will be lost. It will take effect sooner or later.....So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them !.....We are poor, my brothers, we are nobodies, but such have always been the instruments of the Most High."

"I only want men to follow me, who can be true and faithful unto death. I do not care for success or nonsuccess.....I must keep my movement *pure*, or I will have none of it."

"India's doom was sealed the very day they invented the word *mlechchha* and stopped from communion with others."

"An organisation that will teach the Hindus mutual help and appreciation is absolutely necessary."

Koviloor Digital Library

One can quote without end from his epistles, but these will suffice to show how intensely spiritual as well as patriotic his message was. Now he would point out the true spirit of the Vedanta and show where the genius of the Vedic Rishis lay, and then he would cast reflections in the way of contrast between Western and Indian experience. Now he would vigorously criticise the faults of his own people and then show wherein lay their superiority over the civilisation of the West. Now he would draw the attention to the immediate needs of his motherland and then offer practical hints for their solution. And one sees him eager to begin work on a systematic scale in India, a work of pure self-sacrifice and renunciation in which the Sannyâsins in particular should take part, first training themselves, and then going forth from village to village, educating the masses, in material and spiritual matters. In a letter later on he urges :—

"* * * Work among those young men who can devote heart and soul to this one duty—the duty of raising the masses of India. * * * Cultivate the virtue of obedience.....No centralisation is possible unless there is obedience to superiors. No great work can be done without this centralisation of individual forces...Give up jealousy and conceit. Learn to work unitedly for others. This is the great need of our country."

The letters that the Swami sent constantly to India, both to his disciples in Madras and Northern India and also to his *gurubhâis* in the monastery at Baranagore, had almost the same value as his presence. They encouraged all who read them ; they made them ambitious to do and to serve ; and one finds many of his disciples earnestly devoting themselves, at his bidding, to the carrying out of his plans and ideas. Since he commenced his systematic work in New York the Swami was constantly urging his disciples in Madras to start a magazine on Vedantic lines. He even helped them to carry out this project by sending them enough money from the proceeds of his secular lectures, and the magazine called *The Brahmavâdin* came into existence. He urged upon them to study the Sanskrit scriptures and gave the following suggestions in a letter from New

Koviloor Digital Library

York dated the 6th. of May, 1895, as to the lines on which the journal was to be conducted :—

"Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, the Visishtadvaita and Advaita ; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of Religion : The Vedanta applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, *i.e.*, Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity ; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism ; the Advaita as applied in its Yoga perception form, is Buddhism ; and so on. Now, by religion is meant the Vedanta ; the applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings and other circumstances of different nations. You will find that although the philosophy is the same, the Shaktas, Shaivas, and others apply it, each, to their own special cult and *forms*. Now, in your journal write article after article on these three systems, showing their harmony as one following after the other, and at the same time keeping off the ceremonial forms altogether. That is, preach the philosophy, the spiritual part, and let people suit it to their own forms. * * * The journal must not be flippant but steady, calm and high-toned.....Be perfectly unselfish, be steady and work on. * * *"

Mention has been made here of the Swami's Indian letters and of his initiating his Indian work through his disciples at this period, in order to familiarise the reader with the varied and the voluminous character of the Swami's activities and the immense energy which he possessed, for he was carrying on or directing work both in India and in America at One and the same time.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXIV

VEDANTA IDEAS GAINING GROUND.

To return to a further consideration of the Swami's work with his classes in New York, the character of his teaching was largely that of Râja Yoga and Jnâna Yoga. Râja Yoga is the path of the practical assimilation of Spiritual Insight by the inner control of the functions of the senses. It teaches methods by which the nervous system may take up spiritual ideas, weaving them into instincts. This is the beginning and end of this much-abused science. It has nothing to do with occultism or esotericism. It is a life-process, involving the constant spelling of character. To silence the uneasiness of the mind, to tame down the senses, to subordinate sense to reason, in short, to spiritualise the whole personality was, to his mind, the task of Râja Yoga. The Swami taught that the conquest of desire, through subduing and quieting the mind and through directing natural tendency into spiritual channels, was the immediate purpose of this system. Meditation was the key ; and meditation was the art of concentrating the mind upon the soul by regular practice at stated intervals, so as to form the habit of thinking spiritually at all times and thus to attain, through the gradual spiritualisation of the mind, a harmony of personal elements and an ever-enlarging character in illumination. The Swami taught that all human emotions, when transfigured in the spiritualising process must be associated, naturally, with a diminution of the physical and an extension of the spiritual and ecstatic consciousness ; for the whole idea of religion was, to his mind, the overcoming of the physical consciousness ; when consciousness perceives spiritually instead of physically, then the whole order of human awareness is transformed. The ultimate goal was to realise the potential divinity within.

Kovilloor Digital Library

He explained to his students that religion was not a question of belief but of practice, and therewith he asked them to practise systematically certain spiritual and physical exercises by which the body and the mind could be tamed into equilibrium. There are eight processes of restraining the mind. *Yama*, the first of these, involves the control of the physical nature by avoiding externals, and includes morality in all its aspects, and more especially purity, truthfulness and non-injuring. In this regard the Swami said that, "Twelve years of absolute truthfulness in thought, word and deed, gives a man what he will." The second of these is *Niyama*, "not allowing the mind to wander in any direction." Then there is *Asana*, or posture, the best being that "which can be kept longest with the greatest ease." Then should be practised *Prânâyâma*, the restraint of the breath, both in its inward and its outward function. This was to be succeeded by *Pratyâhâra*, the drawing in of the organs from their objects, and by *Dhâranâ*, or the effort at holding the mind to the object of thought. These processes, the Swami said, would bring success if followed properly, certainly within the period of twelve years, and long before this according to the tendency and the rapidity in development of each practitioner. It is not practicable to dwell at great length upon these exercises here. They are elaborately dwell upon in their fullest significance in the Swami's "Râja Yoga" book. Suffice it to say that when a disciple has succeeded in following them he is morally invincible, physically perfect and intellectually illumined. One sees from the very names of these exercises that Râja Yoga is practical mysticism and that it naturally leads to the remaining divisions of the science, namely *Dhyâna*, deep contemplation, or as the Swami called it, "the kernel of the Yoga system", and finally *Samâdhi*, superconsciousness. The last two are the natural outcome of all the preceding ones, marking the graduating and final climaxes in the mystical experience.

In order to achieve success, the Swami said, the students were to live absolutely pure lives, and eat simple *sâtvic* food;

Kovilor Digital Library

else the Yoga practices might lead to grave mental and physical disorders, and even to insanity. At this time the Swami himself led the simple, austere life of the Yogin. Thus his classes took on the aspect of monastic gatherings, wherein were mingled, in common harmony, the highest flights of philosophy and the spiritual recollectedness that characterise men and women who make efforts to renounce, in Christian terms, "the world, the flesh and the devil," or to use a Hindu expression, "the varied forms of Mâyâ." Under the guidance of the Swami his students struggled hard to overcome the mortal by the Immortal, the sense of manifoldness by the sense of Oneness, the animal by the spiritual consciousness, the limited, selfish self by the Universal Unit Self, which man has called Brahman, or God the Absolute.

The chief feature of Râja Yoga he preached as intense recollection or meditation. The results of meditation are often foreshadowed in ordinary life, as when the mind is intensely absorbed by some subject, one forgets his environment, and the breathing becomes regulated and slow, and the body assumes a definite posture. This is often instanced in the case of professors, scientists and deep thinkers. In all ages meditation has been known. Prayer is an approach to it. Concentration is the result. Indeed, it is the state of the mind when there is no longer effort at concentration. Consequently, when the subject is highly spiritual, the physical consciousness is naturally in comparative abeyance. When it is in complete abeyance what is known as Samâdhi occurs. During this state perception becomes thoroughly spiritualised and is transformed into spiritual instincts. The scope of faculty is filled with but one stream of consciousness, and that the deeply religious, the deeply mystical, the deeply spiritual.

As regards the higher experiences and powers, conterminously awakened with the effort to realise the Divine Nature, the Swami knew only too well from his personal knowledge that they occur. There must be *stages* of *degree* in realisation, minor forms of Insight between the commence-

Koviloor Digital Library

ment of effort and the final attainment of the goal in Samâdhi. For example, it is commonly known that in meditation, there may be a sudden welling-up, as it were, of deeper conditions of personality from beneath the surface of normal consciousness and one may find himself outside the body, floating for the time in luminous spheres. Through concentrating the mind upon the different organs of sense hyperæsthesia is likewise often induced, under the influence of which one may smell perfume, or hear sweet music ringing in the ears, or experience an order of taste normally unknown, or find the body radiant with vitality, or feel as if treading on air, and so on. Through concentration of the mind upon certain ideas, the Swami said, more luminous visions, the seeing of other orders of life, additional, physical and mental powers—all these and more come. But all these psycho-physical experiences lose their novelty and attraction when meditation is concentred altogether upon the highest spiritual ideal which is supersensuous in its nature. Finally, by the soul's constant struggle to realise the *very highest* aspects of the Ideal, comes the Beatific Vision Itself, in all its perfect form. This final attainment is that state of pure Mono-Ideism which is called the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi when all dreams end, even that of striving for perfection, for then all the illusion and manifoldness of the mortal consciousness are forever blotted out.

The Swami knew that Râja Yoga and Jnâna Yoga were present in one form or another throughout all ages. He was aware that these two methods were known and somewhat organised in the mediæval Roman Catholic Church by certain of the higher mystics, such as, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Bonaventura of the Franciscan order and Saint Theresa of Jesus and others. But he knew, also, that in India these Paths had been systematically classified. All saints of all times and countries possessed the Consciousness to which both these led and had the mystical experience and insight. But in India these were for ages definitely known and elaborated. As the Swami expressed it, the

Koviloor Digital Library

difference lies in that the Indian Rishis had made a perfect science of these phenomena, whilst others here and there had only stumbled upon them. By great earnestness of intent and prolonged concentration the Western mystics had been unexpectedly overcome by uprushes of the subliminal self and endowed with powers of curing, of prophecy, of "miracle"-working and so on. But in India the Sages *expected* these things to come, so that the teacher knew when and how each spiritual experience would unfold itself in the course of the disciple's training. They did not ascribe origins for them in causes foreign and extraneous to personality; they were entirely subjective phenomena, revealing regions of potential and unexplored power in human personality. To them these powers were the natural outcome of the reachings-out of the Soul in Its effort at penetration into the Beyond, and as such they were to be regarded only *by the way*. To the Hindu mind, *the mind itself after a time becomes the Guru*. Its own constant effort at perceiving Reality empowers it with supernormal functions in the development of faculty.

Regularity in meditation, constant vigilance over the senses, many occasions of self-denial, so the Swami held, are imperative in the practice of Râja Yoga. In this connection he warned his students against the thirsting for the occult, pointing out how it was an *impediment* to the pure spiritual progress. For a seeker's sole concern should be the Realisation of the Soul. The acquisition of psychic powers diverts one from the Way. The real power is not miracle-working, nor psychic experiences, but the power to intensify vision, to acquire a Vedanta character and to realise That Which is Divine. The Swami was almost violent in his denunciation of such sects or persons as subordinated spirituality to that grossest of all superstitions, the mere acquirement of psychic powers. He knew that a man becomes divine if he strives to be so; for this reason he said, following the manner of his own Master, "Seek only after one thing, and that, God!"

Apart from the purely academic and psychological charac-

Kovilloor Digital Library

ter of his teaching both Jnâna and Râja Yoga, the Swamî was a man who put into living practice that which he preached. He was a scientist and mystic in one. One sees him in his New York retreat, in the morning or the evening quiet, or at dead of night, meditating upon the nature of the soul, seeking to pulverise all false ideas which make up the illusion of life. Throughout, his mind constantly concerned itself with supermundane realities. He was always solving problems of thought in relation to the vision of the soul. And here in the West, as the Teacher, he spoke as he did, because he felt and had realised innumerable times that which his voice gave forth so eloquently. In the silent hours of meditation his soul withdrew within itself in the ecstasy of insight. Oftentimes he lost himself in the depth of meditation, his mind all absorbed and his body rigid in meditation posture, revealing his whole nature as merged in the Innermost.

Thus, above all, the Swami was, pre-eminently fitted to teach the practices of meditation. Having lived in a constant atmosphere of spiritual austerities with his Master, having practised innumerable forms of meditation under his guidance, his life a "roaring fire of spirituality" and his mind informed with all the details and intricacies in the experience of the states of meditation,—he was fit to know the tendency of each disciple and to develop each according to the character of special tendencies, giving each, according to his respective nature, special ideals and special forms of meditation. His scientific turn of mind gave him a deep insight into the psychology of Yoga exercises, and therefore he was a careful analyser of his own experiences and those of his disciples as well, endeavouring at all times to give a subjective rather than an objective interpretation to the visions and phenomena of meditation ; and his counsel was to test everything by a rational practice. Whatever he taught to his disciples he said that he had himself *seen*. His theories of the make-up of the nervous system and of its relation to the brain, his statements as to the relation between states of

Koviloor Digital Library

mind and nervous changes, drew the attention of a great number of noted American physicians and physiologists, and several championed his theories, avowing that though his statements were bold they contained truths which were worthy of careful investigation concerning the functions of the body. His claim that meditation brought about the extension and development of human faculty and aroused supernormal experiences, hitherto classified as miraculous phenomena, interested the foremost American psychologists, particularly Prof. William James of Harvard University, to make a study of the variety of religious experience. But his personal disciples were concerned with the spiritual rather than with the learned character of religious study, and their efforts at meditation were to them acts of spiritual devotion.

The Swami's own mind and spirit were open to numerous revelations. He had many premonitions and visions of such a character as to leave no doubt about the genuineness of the experiences. He was never surprised at anything that might come to him in the hours of meditation. He might hear voices, he might see forms, he might feel repeated and intense flows of emotion, that coloured or visualised or embodied the intensity of his thought. Probably no incident portrays so accurately the complexity of the Swami's mystical experience than a vision he had had in his *parivrâjaka* days, some two years after the *mahâsamâdhi* of Sri Ramakrishna, probably in January of 1888. On that occasion he had the vision of an old man standing on the banks of the Indus, and chanting *Riks*, or Vedic *mantrams*, in such a distinctly different form from the accustomed methods of intonation that it could be compared rather to Gregorian plainsong. The passage which he heard was that salutation to Gâyatri which begins,—

आयाहि वरदे देवि त्र्यक्षरे ब्रह्मवादिनी।
गायत्रि छन्दसां मातः ब्रह्मयोनि नमोऽस्तुते॥

"O Come, Thou Effulgent One, Thou Bestower of Blessings, Signifier of Brahman in three letters! Salutation be to Thee,

Koviloor Digital Library

O Gâyatri, Mother of Vedic *mantrams*, Thou Who hast sprung from Brahman !" The Swami believed that through this perception he had recovered the musical cadences of the earliest Aryan ancestors and thought that his own Master must have had a somewhat similar experience, in which he had caught "the rhythm of the Vedas." He also found something remarkably sympathetic to this mode of chanting in the poetry of Sankarâchârya. This exceedingly complex spiritual vision, in which both the aural and the ocular faculties took part, show the extraordinarily developed Yoga power of the Swami, a power which is the fruit of the intense, spiritual forms of meditation.

Another experience he had had, occurred in the days of the Baranagore Math, when he had seen the *Idâ*, *Pingalâ* and the *Sushumnâ*, those subtle nerves in the body through which, according to the Yogis, force-currents of meditation move towards the *Sahasrâra*, or brain ; and when they reach this organ it is held that the whole personality becomes illumined, extraordinary powers in the extension of spiritual faculty become aroused, all veils which obstruct the vision of the soul are torn asunder and the *Jiva* or individual soul is immersed in the bliss of union with the *Paramâtman*.

Certainly, numerous experiences of the soul were his, else how could he have given those surprisingly spiritual addresses which make the volumes of his works, known as Jnâna Yoga and Râja Yoga. And had he not himself come into direct contact with various spiritual realities, certainly he could not have written or preached, as he did, on these most abstract sciences of spiritual psychology, and neither could his interpretations have received the careful attention of the foremost psychologists and scientists of the West. But beyond all the objective features either of his message or his realisation, there is brought constantly to mind the fact that he was a man who had seen God and had fathomed the very Depths of the Soul.

His lectures at this time were replete with the happiest philosophical insight and with extraordinary outbursts of

Koviloor Digital Library

devotion, revealing his nature as, at bottom, that of a Jnâni and a Bhakta, the saint and true mystic in one. It would seem as if suddenly the veils that blind spiritual vision were rent apart, and the Swami would stand before his classes a veritable knower of the Self. His hours when not employed in meditation, in private or class teaching, or in replying to various correspondences, were consumed in the pursuit of secular knowledge which he absorbed and turned to spiritual account. The flow of life in the Western world interested him. He was also engaged at this time in penning those immortal thoughts that have become embodied in his now famous work, "Râja Yoga", and which were originally given as class-lectures in his New York centre.

It was sometime about June, that he completed his work on "Râja Yoga". The manner in which he wrote this is of exceeding interest. His staunch disciple, Miss S. E. Waldo of Brooklyn, was his amanuensis, and she says :—

"It was inspiring to see the Swami as he dictated to me the contents of the work. In delivering his commentaries on the Sutras, he would leave me waiting while he entered deep states of meditation or self-contemplation, to emerge therefrom with some luminous interpretation. I had always to keep the pen dipped in the ink. He might be absorbed for long periods of time and then suddenly his silence would be broken by some eager expression or some long deliberate teaching."

Aye, day after day the Swami was in this constant atmosphere of intense recollectedness and deep intellectual work, teaching Râja Yoga, practising it, writing about it. That the Swami maintained the meditative habit throughout his Western life was remarkable; for the disturbances were innumerable. Apart from the meditation practices and meditation states, the Swami often lost himself in thought. His face often took on that far-off look showing his soul withdrawn from all mortal concerns and merged in the thought of the Absolute. Oftentimes whilst those about him were discussing vivaciously or talking frivolously, it would be noticed that the Swami's eyes would grow fixed, his breath would come slower and slower till there would be a pause

Kodaikanal Digital Library

and then the gradual return, when he would be conscious of his environment. It is said of him that :—

"His friends knew these things and provided for them. If he walked into the house, to pay a call, and forgot to speak ; or if he was found in a room, in silence, no one disturbed him, though he would sometimes rise and render assistance to an intruder, without breaking the train of thought. Thus his interest lay within, and not without. To the scale and range of his thought his conversation was of course our only clue."

The Swami had already made, of many distinguished persons, his ardent admirers and even his disciples. It was his earnest desire to initiate a few as Sannyâsins, and to train them so that they would be fitted to carry on his American work in his absence. Two had already become "his proclaimed disciples", though they had not as yet received actual initiation into Sannyâs. These were Madame Marie Louise and Herr Leon Landsberg. The description of these two followers of the Swami is best given in *The New York Herald* a few months after they received Sannyâs in the summer of 1895. To quote from the paper :—

"The Swami Abhayananda is a Frenchwoman, but naturalised and twenty-five years a resident of New York. She has a curious history. For a quarter of a century she has been known to liberal circles as a materialist, socialist...Twelve months ago she was a prominent member of the Manhattan Liberal Club. Then she was known in the press and on the platform as Mme. Marie Louise, a fearless, progressive, advanced woman, whose boast it was that she was always in the forefront of the battle and ahead of her times.

"The second disciple is also an enthusiast. With that skill which Vivekananda shows in all his dealings with men, the Hindu has chosen his first disciples well. The Swami Kripananda, before he was taken into the circle and took the vows of poverty and chastity, was a newspaper man, employed on the staff of one of the most prominent New York papers. By birth he is a Russian Jew, named Leon Landsberg, and, if it were known, his life history is probably as interesting as that of Swami Abhayananda. • • •"

Among others who were devoted to the Swami's teachings were Mrs. Ole Bull, wife of the celebrated violinist and Norwegian nationalist, Dr. Allan Day, Miss S. E. Waldo, Professors Wyman and Wright, Dr. Street, and many clergymen and laymen of note. It was in these days that

Koviloor Digital Library

Sarah Bernhardt, the famous French actress, the "Divine Sarah" as she is called, sought an interview with him and expressed her admiration and intense interest in the sublime teachings of the philosophy he so eloquently and so truly represented. Later on Madame Calvé, the celebrated singer, became his ardent devotee. Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett and Miss J. MacLeod, well-known society people of New York, became his most intimate friends and helped him in various ways. The members of the Dixon Society, before which he was invited many times to lecture, became the champions of his ideas, and later on the great electrician, Nicolas Tesla, hearing the Swami's exposition of the Sânkhya philosophy, admitted the superiority of its cosmogony and of its rational theories of the Kalpas (cycles), Prâna and Akâsha, to which, Mr. Tesla said, modern science might well look for the solution of cosmological problems, and which he assured the Swami that he could prove even mathematically.

The cosmological theory of the Sânkhya is that the universe is eternal, matter and force, Akâsha and Prâna, being eternal elements. The work of Creation or rather projection, commences by the one acting upon the other, in cycles of evolution and dissolution, and *vice versa.* At the end of the cycle,—matter and force being perpetually conserved, though the forms and cosmological facts these reveal be ever changing and disintegrating,—the whole universe merges in the seed form, as it were, and after a period of quiescence evolves again by the same process. The theory of the Advaita Vedanta is a complement to the Sânkhya in so far as it postulates the comparative unreality of form and takes cognizance of the Spirit, expressing itself as individual souls through the revelations of the universe; but being *per se* eternally free, the goal of each individual is to free himself from the entanglements of a purely physical consciousness, which the illusive changes of the universe bring on, and to perceive amidst the diversity of form the Unit Eternal and Free Spirit.

Kovilloor Digital Library

By the month of June, 1895, the Swami had placed his work on a solid foundation. He had constant support from wealthy and influential followers and whatever financial returns he received went towards the further consolidation of his work. Though he was helped, he also helped himself, as has been seen, giving secular lectures to enhance the scope of his spiritual labours. Not content with the success of his work in America, the Swami as early as August, 1894 meditated a trip to England. He decided that the whole Western world should hear of the Light of Asia and the glory of the Indian Dharma. Besides his manifold labours and innumerable plans and hopes, he had to make his way constantly explaining himself and his ideas to numerous audiences in which were strangely mingled such opposite types as the hod-carrier and the scientist.

Various moods visited the Swami in the year 1895. It was this year when he worked hardest, when he hoped most, when he endeavoured most of all to gain a number of souls of whom he could be sure of carrying on his work. He went into the very heart of things in his efforts to make some see his vision and become free. He had all manner of plans ; he longed, at times, for an organisation that would be the incarnate representative of his ideas and of his aspirations. Amidst the enormous difficulty of settling himself in a new land, amidst all the strain of propagating new ideas to those who were bred and brought up in a different ideal of life and religion, the Swami in spite of his indomitable will and vigour sometimes felt worried and exhausted. He was at times led to think that all work was after all carried on in the trap of Mâyâ, but he knew that there was no other object in work except personal purification. Thus one finds him writing to a disciple to say that he had done his best, that he was working out the great Karma that had fallen upon him and that he hoped that the Lord would soon liberate him from the task of preaching. And in one of his epistles he cries out, even as early as January 1895, "I long, oh I long for my rags, my shaven head, my sleep under the

Kovilpur Digital Library

trees, and my food from begging;" and in another mood, in the latter part of March of the same year, he writes, "* * That is why I desire so much to have a centre. Organisation has its faults, no doubt, but without that nothing can be done. * * * One must work as the dictate comes from within, and then if it is right and good, society is bound to veer round perhaps centuries after he is dead and gone. * * *"

These words show the spirit of the man, burdened with much affliction and yet bent on giving his message, bent on working, and yet in the long run indifferent to the fruits. He did not believe in external success. He was truly ready to *wait*, even for centuries. His immediate hope was to break down religious sectarianism and superstition and to make each soul Self-reliant. He wanted to do away with spiritual dependence and to enable men to realise the truths of the Advaita Vedanta that make one stand on his own feet, afraid of nothing, desirous of nothing, indifferent to the blows of fate and self-centred in the sense of the Divine and the Immeasurable, having realised the Self, the One Reality, both *within*, subjectively, and *without*, practically in the feeling of the oneness of all life, and in the living demonstration thereof. He was eager to spread the ideal of the highest spiritual realisation, making of each Saviour and World-Teacher a luminous torchlight of truth. All of them were to his mind Messengers of Light, apostles and prophets in an equal sense, and he would have all men adore each and every Son of Man, seeing their *Ishtam* in them. He wanted to spiritualise philosophy as he found it in the West, and to found a universal brotherhood of all religions so that each and every human heart would find its relationship to every great human ideal and would worship in all sanctuaries, accepting all truths and belonging to all folds of religious effort. But this was an ideal that, by reason of its very universality, puzzled most minds. "Is it possible?" "Can one do so?" they asked. The Swami, in his own life and example, gave the answer. For he could worship at all altars, seeing the same Light within the forms of all religious belief. He worshipped and

Kovilor Digital Library

adored Jesus and men stood in awe at his great reverence for Buddha; his veneration for Mohammed and for Krishna was alternately in the forefront of his thought and meditation. Then, too, he could place himself in actual relationship to the Mother, and at the same time rise to the consciousness of the Indivisible Brahman. His personality was literally saturated with all ideals and his spirituality was of unlimited richness, the treasures of which he freely distributed irrespective of the creed, nationality, and social position of those with whom he came into contact.

In the cause of spreading the propaganda of the Vedanta, as he himself has said, he was ready to sacrifice everything, even his life. He would work, work, work. But in the very midst of work he would always inwardly rest in the silent and blissful freedom of the life of the true Sannyâsin! He was now in the very rush of the world. He found, however, that even some of his devoted followers interfered unintentionally in the method of carrying out his work. Now perhaps some stilted Boston lady would ask him to take elocution lessons, as if he who had shaken the very soul of the Parliament of Religions and was a born teacher of men needed lessons from a professor of elocution! Another would worry him about *how* to organise; another would say "Swami, you must do so and so; you must live in better surroundings, and you must be *fashionable* so as to reach and influence the society people." At all this the Swami would become fierce with righteous indignation, and exclaim, "Why shall I be bound down with all this nonsense? I am a *monk*, a MONK who has realised the vanity of all earthly nonsense! I have no time to give a finish to my manners. I cannot find time enough to give my message. I will give it after my own fashion. Liberty, Mukti, is my religion. I shall never be dictated to. I feel I am guided by the Most High, and as I am guided so shall I do. I don't care for your sort of success. Shall *I* be dragged down into the narrow limits of your conventional life? *Never!*"

In the course of a letter to an esteemed friend the

CC-0. Digitized by

Swami wrote in April: "Miss H—wants me to be introduced to the 'right kind of people'. This is the second edition of the 'hold yourself steady' business, I am afraid. The only 'right sort of people' are those whom the Lord sends—that is what I understand in my life's experience. They alone can and will help me. As for the rest, Lord bless them in a mass and save me from them!" And then the Swami proceeds to say that, even if he did live in poor quarters the right kind of people did come to him and even she who had criticised him. Then he launched forth in an eloquent appeal to Lord Shiva, in which he dedicates himself entirely to the Will of the Lord, writing in his anguish and in his burning love,—"Lord, since a child I have taken refuge in Thee. You will be with me in the tropics or at the poles, on the tops of mountains or in the depths of oceans. * *" And a few days later he writes, "* * The less help from man the more from the Lord." And again, three days later, he writes, "It is the duty of a teacher always to turn out the 'right sort' from the most unrighteous sort of persons. * * * Through the mercy of Ramakrishna my instinct 'sizes up' almost infallibly a human face as soon as I see it. * * *"

The Swami was always grateful for any kindness shown to him. About this time he gave those who had befriended him in his early days in America rich presents sent to him for this purpose by the Prime Minister of Junagad and the Maharajah of Mysore. Now perhaps it would be a Kashmiri shawl, then a costly Indian carpet, then, perhaps, a valuable piece of brass or some exquisite silk or muslin. He also wrote to his Indian disciples to send him *Rudrâksha* beads and *Kushâsanas*, which he gave to those initiated disciples who were practising regular meditation.

All through 1895 the Swami's work was enormous; he was in the very whirlwind of work; lecturing both privately and publicly, and always at a tension, he began to feel himself wearing out. He found his nerves wracked, his brain tired, his whole personality exhausted. He longed for a brief

Koviloor Digital Library

period of rest and recuperation. Personally and morally he was satisfied. His message was being received with a kindly spirit. Thousands upon thousands had heard him and had become the disciples of his message. In truth, the Swami had thousands of disciples, though perhaps most of them never saw him. In his rushing hither and thither over the American continent, he had scattered ideas, and he himself saw that they were being echoed in pulpits and in rostrums, though it might be that his name was not always mentioned in the connection. He was satisfied that the ideas of the Sanatana Dharma were spreading and percolating through the whole thought world of America. In July, 1895, he had written to the Maharajah of Khetri that he was bent on preaching, that the more the Christian missionaries opposed him, the more determined he was to leave a permanent impression on Christian countries. And he stated that his plan was to initiate some of his followers into Sannyâs and have them continue the work.

Truly, the Swami had success and Vedanta ideas were gaining ground everywhere. To have impressed the entire American nation with a new thought had been no easy task. And to have done so within two years of work was all the more the wonder. The Swami had, no doubt, the Divine Power behind him; he had intense sincerity, great ability and unwearying perseverance. Above all, he had Realisation. That was the secret.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXV

AT THOUSAND ISLAND PARK.

Having almost exhausted himself by the uninterrupted work of class and public lecturing, the Swami in the beginning of June, 1895, accepted the invitation of one of his friends and went to Percy, N. H., for a period of rest in the silence of the pine woods. He had laboured with superhuman energy, delivering many public speeches before clubs and religious conferences, sometimes lecturing twice or thrice a day, and in company with Dr. Paul Carus, had addressed large audiences in connection with the Parliament of Religious Extension. His classes in New York grew out of all proportion, and it must have been gratifying to him to see how the ever-increasing close ranks of students, forgetting all inconveniences, hung breathless on his every word. And yet these classes were to be outdone by the glory and the light of those he held at Thousand Island Park in the immediate future. Before he left for Percy, N. H., his disciples were eager that he should return and continue his work of teaching through the summer months, but being too tired, he demurred against prolonging his work at a tension through the hot weather; besides, many of his students had arranged to leave New York for seaside or mountain resorts. In the language of Miss Waldo, the charming description of the Thousand Island Park and of the Swami's sojourn there is here quoted at length :—

"The problem solved itself. One of our number owned a small cottage at Thousand Island Park, the largest island in the St. Lawrence River; and she offered the use of it to the Swami and as many of us as it would accommodate. This plan appealed to the Swami and he agreed to join us there after a brief visit to the Maine Camp (Percy, N.H.) of one of his friends."

"The Swami said that those students who were willing to put aside all other interests and devote themselves to studying the Vedanta, travelling more than three hundred miles to a suitable spot were the

Kovilloor Digital Library

ones really in earnest, and he should recognise them as disciples. He did not expect many would take so much trouble, but if any responded, he would do his share of helping them on the path.

"Miss D., the student to whom the cottage belonged, feeling that a special sanctuary should be prepared for the occasion, built as a true love offering to her Teacher, a new wing that was nearly as large as the original cottage. The place was ideally situated on high ground, overlooking a wide sweep of the beautiful river with many of its far-famed Thousand Islands. Clayton could be dimly discerned in the distance, while the nearer and wider Canadian shores bounded the view to the north. The cottage stood on the side of a hill, which on the north and west sloped down abruptly towards the shores of the river and of a little inlet that like a small lake lay behind the house. The house was literally 'built upon a rock', and huge boulders lay all around it. The new wing stood on the steep slope of the rocks like a great lantern tower with windows on three sides, three stories deep at the back, and only two in front. The lower room was occupied by one of the students. The one over it opened out of the main part of the house by several doors, and being large and convenient, became our class-room, where for hours each day the Swami gave us familiar instruction. Over this room was the one devoted exclusively to the use of the Swami. In order that it might be perfectly secluded, Miss D. had supplied it with a separate outside staircase, although there was also a door opening upon the second story of the piazza.

"This upstairs piazza played an important part in our lives, as all the Swami's evening talks were given here. It was wide and roomy, roofed in, and extended along the south and west sides of the cottage. Miss D. had the west side of it carefully screened off by a partition, so that none of the strangers who frequently visited the piazza to see the magnificent view it commanded, could intrude upon our privacy. There, close by his own door, sat our beloved Teacher every evening during our stay and communed with us who sat silent in the darkness, eagerly drinking in his inspired words. The place was a veritable sanctuary. At our feet, like a sea of green, waved the leaves of the tree tops, for the entire place was surrounded by thick woods. Not one house of the large village could be seen, it was as if we were in the heart of some dense forest, miles away from the haunts of men. Beyond the trees spread the wide expanse of the St. Lawrence, dotted here and there with islands, some of which gleamed bright with the lights of hotels and boarding-houses. All these were so far away that they seemed more like a pictured scene than a reality. Not a human sound penetrated our seclusion ; we heard but the murmur of the insects, the sweet songs of the birds, or the gentle sighing of the wind through the leaves. Part

Koviloor Digital Library

of the time the scene was illumined by the soft rays of the moon and her face was mirrored in the shining waters beneath. In this scene of enchantment, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot,' we spent seven blessed weeks with our beloved Teacher, listening to his words of inspiration. Immediately after our evening meal each day of our stay, we all repaired to the upper piazza and awaited the coming of our Master. Nor had we long to wait, for hardly had we assembled ere the door of his room would open and he would quickly step out and take his accustomed seat. He always spent two hours with us and more often much longer. One glorious night, when the moon was about full, he talked to us until she set below the western horizon, apparently as unconscious as we were of the lapse of time.

"To those who were fortunate enough to be there with the Swami, those were weeks of ever-hallowed memory, so fraught were they with unusual opportunity for spiritual growth. No words can describe what that blissful period meant (and still means) to the devoted little band who followed the Swami from New York to the island in the St. Lawrence, who daily served him with joy and listened to him with heartfelt thankfulness. His whole heart was in his work and he taught like one inspired.

"Of these talks it was not possible to take notes. They are preserved only in the hearts of the hearers. None of us can ever forget the sense of uplift, the intense spiritual life of those hallowed hours. The Swami poured out all his heart at those times, his own struggles were enacted again before us ; the very spirit of his Master seemed to speak through his lips, to satisfy all doubts, to answer all questioning, to soothe every fear. Many times the Swami seemed hardly conscious of our presence, and then we almost held our breath for fear of disturbing him and checking the flow of his thoughts. He would rise from his seat and pace up and down the narrow limits of the piazza, pouring forth a perfect torrent of eloquence.

"The Swami did not appear to address us directly, but rather seemed to be speaking to himself in words of fire, as it were, so intense were they, and so convincing, burning into the very hearts of his listeners never to be forgotten.

"Never was he more gentle, more loveable than during these hours. It may have been much like the way his own great Master taught his disciples, just allowing them to listen to the outpourings of his own spirit in communion with himself.

"It was a perpetual inspiration to live with a man like Swami Vivekananda. From morning till night it was ever the same, we lived in a constant atmosphere of intense spirituality. Often playful and fun-loving, full of merry jest and quick repartee, he was never for a moment

Kavikor Digital Library

far from the dominating note of his life. Everything could furnish a text or an illustration, and in a moment we would find ourselves swept from amusing tales of Hindu mythology to the deepest philosophy. The Swami had an inexhaustible fund of mythological lore and surely no race is more abundantly supplied with myths than those ancient Aryans. He loved to tell them to us and we delighted to listen, for he never failed to point out the reality hidden under myth and story and to draw from it valuable spiritual lessons. Never had fortunate students greater cause to congratulate themselves on having so gifted a Teacher!

"Those ideas were new and strange to us, and we were slow in assimilating them, but the Swami's patience never flagged, his enthusiasm never waned. In the afternoons he talked to us more informally, and we took usually a long walk.

"By a singular coincidence just twelve students followed the Swami to Thousand Island Park, and he told us that he accepted us as real disciples and that was why he so constantly and freely taught us, giving us his best. All the twelve were not together at once, ten being the largest number present at any one time. Two of our number subsequently became Sannyâsins. * * *

"The ceremony of initiation was impressive from its extreme simplicity. A small altar fire, beautiful flowers and the earnest words of the Teacher alone marked it as different from our daily lessons. It took place at sunrise of a beautiful summer day and the scene still lives fresh in our memories. * * *

"On the occasion of the consecration of the second Sannyâsin, the Swami initiated five of us as Brahmachârins.

"It was decided, when we went to Thousand Island Park, that we should live as a community, each doing his or her share of the house-work in order that no alien presence should mar the serenity of our household. The Swami himself was an accomplished cook and often prepared for us delicious dishes. * * *

"Every morning, just as soon as our various tasks were over (and often before), the Swami called us together in the large parlour that served us as a class-room and began to teach us. Each day he took up some special subject, or expounded from some sacred book, as the Bhagavad-Gita, the Upanishads, or the Vedanta Sutras of Vyasa. The Sutras are in the form of aphorisms, being the briefest possible statements of the great truths imbedded in the Vedas. They have neither nominative nor verb, and so intent were the writers of them on eliminating every unnecessary word, that a Hindu proverb says that 'a writer of Sutras would 'rather give one of his sons than add a syllable to his Sutra.'

"Because of their almost enigmatical brevity the Vedanta Sutras offer a rich field for the commentator, and three great Hindu

Kovilpoor Digital Library

philosophers, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, wrote elaborate commentaries upon them. In his morning talks the Swami would take up first one of these commentaries, then another, showing how each commentator was guilty of twisting the meaning of the Sutras to meet his own particular view, and would read into the aphorism whatever would best substantiate his own interpretation. The Swami often pointed out to us how old is the habit of 'text-torturing.'

"Thus it was that in these lessons the point of view presented was sometimes that of pure dualism as represented by Madhva, while on another day it was that of the qualified non-dualism taught by Ramanuja, known as Visishtadvaita. Most frequently, however, the monistic commentary of Sankara was taken up ; but because of his subtlety, he was more difficult to understand, so to the end Ramanuja remained the favourite among the students.

"Sometimes the Swami took up the Bhakti Sutras of Narada. They are a short exposition of devotion to God, which gives one some conception of the lofty Hindu ideal of real, all-absorbing love for the Lord, love that literally possesses the devotee to the exclusion of every other thought. * * *

"In these talks the Swami for the first time spoke to us at length about his great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, of his daily life with him and of his struggles with his own tendency to unbelief, which at times drew tears from his Master. The other disciples have often said that Sri Ramakrishna always told them that Swami Vivekananda was a great Soul, who had come especially to help his work and that as soon as he knew who he really was, he would at once give up the body. But, he added, before that time arrived, there was a certain mission which the Swami would have to accomplish, to help not only India but other lands as well. Frequently Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I have other disciples far away, who speak a language I do not understand.'

"As the days and weeks passed by, we began to really understand and grasp the meaning of what we heard and we gladly accepted the teaching. Every one of the students there received initiation by *mantram* at the hands of the Swami, thus becoming his disciples, the Swami assuming towards them the position of Guru, or spiritual father, as is done in India, where the tie uniting Guru and disciple is the closest one known, outranking that of a parent and child, or even husband and wife. * * * "

Mrs. Funke speaking of her delightful experience at Thousand Island Park writes as follows :—

"We (she and a friend of hers) had no chance to meet him in a personal way at the time (during his first visit to Detroit), but we listened and pondered in our hearts over all that we had heard him say, resolving to

Kovilloor Digital Library

find him sometime, somewhere, even if we had to go across the world to do it. We lost trace of him completely for one year and a half and thought that probably he had returned to India, but one afternoon we were told by a friend that he was still in this country and that he was spending the summer at Thousand Island Park. We started the next morning, resolved to seek him out and ask him to teach us.

"At last after a weary search we found him. We were feeling very much frightened at our temerity in thus intruding upon his privacy, but he had lighted a fire in our souls that could not be quenched. We must know more of this wonderful man and his teaching. It was a dark and rainy night and we were weary after our long journey, but we could not rest until we had seen him face to face. Would he accept us? And if he did not, what then could we do? It suddenly seemed to us that it might be a foolish thing to go several hundred miles to find a man who did not even know of our existence, but we plodded on up the hill in the rain and darkness, with a man we had hired to show us the way with his lantern. Speaking of this in after years, our Guru would refer to us as 'my disciples, who travelled hundreds of miles to find me and they came in the night and in the rain.' We had thought of what to say to him, but when we realised that we had really found him, we instantly forgot all our fine speeches and one of us blurted out, 'We came from Detroit and Mrs. P. sent us to you.' The other said, 'We have come to you just as we would go to Jesus if He were still on the earth and ask Him to teach us.' He looked at us so kindly and said gently, 'If only I possessed the power of the Christ to set you free now!' He stood for a moment looking thoughtful and then turning to his hostess who was standing near, said, 'These ladies are from Detroit, please show them upstairs and allow them to spend the evening with us.' We remained until late listening to the Master who paid no more attention to us, but as we bade them all good-night we were told to come the next morning at nine o'clock. We arrived promptly, and to our great joy were accepted by the Master and were cordially invited to become members of the household.

"* * * It was a most blessed summer. I have never seen our Master quite as he was then. He was at his best among those who loved him.

"There were twelve of us and it seemed as if Pentecostal fire descended and touched the Master. One afternoon when he had been telling us of the glory of renunciation, of the joy and freedom of those of the ochre robe, he suddenly left us and in a short time he had written his 'Song of the Sannyâsin,' a very passion of sacrifice and renunciation. I think the thing which impressed me most in those days was his infinite patience and gentleness—like a father with his children, though most

Koviloor Digital Library

of us were several years older than he. After a morning in the class-room where it almost seemed as if he had gazed into the very face of the Infinite, he would leave the room returning soon to say, 'Now I am going to cook for you.' And with what patience would he stand over the stove and prepare some Indian tit-bit for us! The last time he was with us in Detroit he prepared for us the most delicious curries. What a lesson to his disciples,—the brilliant, the great and learned Vivekananda ministering to their little wants! He was at those times so gentle, so benign! What a legacy of sacred tender memories has he left us! ***"

Wednesday, the nineteenth of June, marked the beginning of the regular teaching given daily by Swami Vivekananda to his group of disciples at Thousand Island Park. He came on this first morning with the Bible in his hand and opened it at the Book of John, saying that since the students were all Christians, it was proper that he should begin with the Christian Scriptures. In these daily talks during the seven memorable weeks he took up, many of the days, some texts from the various sacred books of the Hindus, such as, the Vedanta Sutras of Vyâs, the Bhakti Sutras of Narada, the Bhagavad-Gitâ, the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali, the Brihadaranyakopanishad, the Kathopanishad and the Avadhuta Gitâ of Dattâtreya, and delivered the most uplifting sermons. With the sixth of August ended these beautiful lessons and on the following day he left for New York.

Though all the sayings of the Swami during his stay at Thousand Island Park were not written down, some were, and these have been embodied in book-form, known as "Inspired Talks." It is to Miss Waldo that the followers of the Swami are indebted for these immortal words and the title of the book has been well-chosen, for they were indeed inspired. The following are some of the numerous sayings of the Swami at this time :—

"Be brave and sincere ; then follow any path with devotion and you must reach the Whole."

"One-sidedness is the bane of the world. The more sides you can develop, the more souls you have and you can see the universe through all souls."

"Look at the 'ocean' and not at the 'wave' ; see no difference between ant and angel. Every worm is the brother of the Nazarene. How

Koviloor Digital Library

say one is greater and one less? Each is great in his own place. We are in the sun and in the stars as much as here. Spirit is beyond space and time, and is everywhere. Every mouth praising the Lord is my mouth, every eye seeing is my eye. We are confined nowhere; we are not body, the universe is our body. We are magicians waving magic wands and creating scenes before us at will..... We are now conscious only where the body is, we can use only one brain; but when we reach ultra-consciousness, we know all, we can use all brains. * *

"Know you are the Infinite, then fear must die. Say ever 'I and my Father are one'."

"Until you are ready to change any minute you can never see the truth; but you must hold fast and be steady in the search for truth."

"Materialism says, 'The voice of freedom is a delusion.' Idealism says, 'The voice that tells of bondage is delusion.' Vedanta says, 'You are free and not free at the same time; never free on the earthly plane, but ever free on the spiritual. Be beyond both freedom and bondage."

"The greatest sin is to think yourself weak. No one is greater; realise you are Brahman. Nothing has power except what you give it. We are beyond the sun, the stars, the universe. Teach the Godhood of man. Deny evil, create none. Stand up and say, 'I am the master, the master of all.' We forge the chain and we alone can break it."

"The whole secret of existence is to have no fear. Never fear what will become of you, depend on no one. Only the moment you reject all help are you free."

"Philosophy in India means that through which we see God, the *rationale* of religion; so no Hindu would ever ask for a link between religion and Philosophy."

"No law can make you free, you *are* free. Nothing can give you freedom, if you have it not already. The Atman is self-illumined. Cause and effect do not reach there, and this disembodiedness is freedom. Beyond what was, or is, or is to be, is Brahman. As an effect, freedom would have no value: it would be a compound, and as such would contain the seeds of bondage. It is the one real factor, not to be attained, but the real nature of the soul."

"Unchaste imagination is as bad as unchaste action. Controlled desire leads to the highest result. Transform the sexual energy into spiritual energy but do not emasculate, because that is throwing away the power. The stronger this force, the more can be done with it."

"Neither seek nor avoid, take what comes. It is liberty to be affected by nothing; do not merely endure, be unattached. Remember the story of the bull. A mosquito sat long on the horn of a certain bull; then his conscience troubled him and he said: 'Mr. Bull, I have been sitting here a long time, perhaps I annoy you. I am sorry, I will go

Koviloor Digital Library

away.' But the bull replied: 'Oh no, not at all! Bring your whole family and live on my horn: what can you do to me?'"

"Those who give themselves up to the Lord do more for the world than all the so-called workers. One man who has purified himself thoroughly, accomplishes more than a regiment of preachers. Out of purity and silence comes the word of power."

"Go into your own room and get the Upanishads out of your own Self. You are the greatest book that ever was or ever will be, the infinite depositary of all that is. Until the inner teacher opens, all outside teaching is in vain. It must lead to the opening of the book of the heart to have any value."

"The will is the 'still small voice,' the real ruler,.....The will can be made strong in thousands of ways; every way is a kind of Yoga, but the systematised Yoga accomplishes the work more quickly. Bhakti, Karma, Raja and Jnana Yoga get over the ground more effectively. Put on all powers, philosophy, work, prayer, meditation; crowd all sail, put on all head of steam, and reach the goal. The sooner, the better."

"Never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which *I am*."

"The wicked pay the price of the great soul's holiness. Think of that when you see a wicked man. Just as the poor man's labour pays for the rich man's luxury, so is it in the spiritual world. The terrible degradation of the masses in India is the price Nature pays for the production of great souls like Mirabâi, Buddha, etc."

"The old idea was, 'Develop one idea at the expense of all the rest.' The modern way is, 'Harmonious development.'"

"Take everyone where he stands and push him forward. Religious teaching must always be constructive, not destructive.

"Each tendency shows the life-work of the past, the line or radius along which that man must move. All radii lead to the centre. Never attempt to disturb anyone's tendencies; to do that puts back both teacher and taught. When you teach Jnanam, you must become a Jnani and stand mentally exactly where the taught stands. Similarly in every other Yoga. Develop every other faculty as if it were the only one possessed; this is the secret of so-called harmonious development. That is, get extensity with intensity, but not at its expense. • • •

"The true teacher is one who can throw his whole force into the tendency of the taught."

"Cleanse the mind, this is all of religion;.....The baby sees no sin; he has not yet the measure of it in himself. Get rid of the defects within yourself and you will not be able to see any without. A baby sees robbery done and it means nothing to him. Once you find the

Kovilor Digital Library

hidden object in a puzzle picture, you see it ever more; so when once you are free and stainless, you see only freedom and purity in the world around. That moment all the knots of the heart are cut asunder, all crooked places are made straight and this world vanishes as a dream. And when we awake, we wonder how we ever came to dream such trash!"

"With the axe of knowledge cut the wheels asunder and the Atman stands free, even though the old momentum carries on the wheel of mind and body. The wheel can now only go straight, can only do good. If that body does anything bad, know that the man is not '*jivanmukta*'; he lies if he makes that claim. But it is only when the wheels have got a good straight motion (from cleansing the mind) that the axe can be applied. All purifying action deals conscious or unconscious blows on delusion. To call another a sinner is the worst thing you can do. Good action done even ignorantly helps us to break the bondage.

"To identify the sun with the spots on the object glass is the fundamental error. Know the sun, the 'I', to be ever unaffected by anything, and devote yourself to cleansing the spots. Man is the greatest being that can ever be. The highest worship there is, is to worship man, as Krishna, Buddha, Christ. What you want, you create. Get rid of desire.

"What you only grasp intellectually may be overthrown by a new argument, but what you realise is yours forever. Talking, talking religion is but little good. Put God behind everything, man, animal, food, work; make this a habit."

One could continue quoting these remarkably luminous and supremely spiritual sayings of the Swami at the Thousand Island Park. These are chosen because they show the character and scope of his philosophy and his realisation. At Thousand Island Park it was both a feast of reason and a flow of soul. The Swami threw light upon all manner of subjects, both historical and philosophical, both spiritual and temporal. It was as if the whole contents of his nature were pouring themselves forth in a grand revelation of the many facets of Eternal Truth. Certainly the seven weeks at the Thousand Island Park were one of the freest and the greatest periods in the Swami's life. He was there in the uninterrupted stillness of the island retreat. He was far away from noisy or ignorant questioners and from persons who thought it their business to criticise and bother him. He was

Kavibhar Digital Library

away from the strain of giving himself wholly in pushing forth his message in spite of almost insurmountable difficulties. He was in an atmosphere similar to that in which his Master lived and taught in the Dakshineswar days of old. And there on the banks of the St. Lawrence, in a mood of supreme ecstasy, he had, one day, entered in the course of meditation into the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi as he had done in the days of blessed memory at Cossipur. Though at the time he spoke of it to no one he reckoned this experience as one of the most exalted in his life. He was there the real teacher and the servant of his group of disciples. And it is told of him how greatly and with what sweet, personal tenderness he endeavoured to awaken the highest nature of the group of disciples. The whirlwind of spiritual rhapsody and ecstasy that had swept the souls of devotees in Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganges, swept here anew the souls of other devotees in the island retreat of the beautiful St. Lawrence river, and the spirit of the Master and the realisation of the Swami burned constantly in vast, ignorance-destroying flames.

Just before leaving New York for Thousand Island Park the Swami had received an invitation to visit the Greenacre Conferences, but he declined. The reason of this one finds in a letter written to a friend in which he said that, he intended "to manufacture a few Yogis out of the materials of the classes and a busy fair like Greenacre is the last place for that". Therefore he had decided to go to the St. Lawrence retreat. For his work at Thousand Island Park his short stay at Percy, New Hampshire, evidently fitted him. There in the silence of the pines he read the Gita, meditated alone in the stillness of the forest by the hours and days. His one idea was to be by himself in communion with the Highest; and therefore it was little wonder that he came forth from the solitude a very avalanche of spirituality, making his disciples realise many forms of Truth at but a glance or touch or wish.

In the autumn of 1895, following upon his Thousand Island work, the Swami is seen writing to the Swami Abhayananda

Koviloor Digital Library

concerning organisation. Dissatisfied with those who mistook what he meant by the term organisation in his letter, and who did not catch the spirit, thinking, perhaps, that he wanted to "make a success" of his work, he wrote :—

"We have no organisation (in that sense), nor want to build any. Each one is quite independent to teach, quite free to preach whatever he or she likes. If you have the spirit within, you will never fail to attract others. * * * *

"Individuality is my motto. I have no ambition beyond training individuals. I know very little ; that little I teach without *reserve ;* where I am ignorant I confess it as *such*, * * I am a Sannyâsin. As such I hold myself as a *servant*, not as a Master in this world."

And he adds that whether people love him or hate him, they all are alike welcome. He says that he seeks no help, nor rejects any, that he has no right to be helped and that if he is helped by any it is their mercy. He avers that when he became a Sannyâsin he did so with his whole mind, welcoming anything, even starvation and the utmost misery.

Gradually his disciples came to understand his ideal. Possessed with the Western consciousness of the solidity of external forms of organisation they had not readily seen that what he desired was a spiritual rather than a temporal organisation, a union of noble, pure, persevering and energetic souls, bent on personal realisation and moved to work by a genuine interest and love for humanity. He had carried on his work in this spirit, and already it had assumed large proportions and many were his followers. And in a letter to a distinguished Indian he said, in the glory of his realisations at the Thousand Island Park, " * * I am free, my bonds are cut, what care I whether this body goes or does not go. * * * I have a truth to teach, I, the child of God. And He Who gave me the truth will send me fellow-workers from the Earth's bravest and best. * * *" Now and then the MONK would come out in protest to his surroundings and distractions. His poem, "The Song of the Sannyâsin", considered by some to be his master-piece, was written in a state of spiritual fervour and in protest to one who interfered with his life, trying to dictate terms to him. He had received a

Koviloor Digital Library

letter, criticising his determination to work among the people instead of among the rich; and as an answer he sent back by return mail, "The Song of the Sannyâsin". Three verses selected from this poem afford an excellent insight into the ardour and the power of the Swami's spirit of Sannyâs and of his Realisation, showing to what grand occasions he could rise:

* * * * * *

Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
Of shining gold, or darker, baser ore;
Love, hate—good, bad—and all the dual throng
Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free;
For fetters though of gold, are not less strong to bind.
Then, off with them, Sannyâsin bold! Say—

"OM TAT SAT, OM!"

* * * * * *

Heed then no more how body lives or goes,
Its task is done. Let Karma float it down;
Let one put garlands on, another kick
This frame; say naught. No praise or blame can be
Where praiser, praised, and blamer, blamed are,—one.
Thus be thou calm, Sannyâsin bold! Say—

"OM TAT SAT, OM!"

* * * * * *

Few only know the Truth. The rest will hate
And laugh at thee, great one; but pay no heed.
Go thou, the free, from place to place, and help
Them out of darkness, Maya's veil. Without
The fear of pain or search for pleasure, go
Beyond them both, Sannyâsin bold! Say—

"OM TAT SAT, OM!"

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXVI

THE FIRST VISIT TO ENGLAND.

Having fulfilled his great work of training and initiating disciples at Thousand Island Park, the Swami returned to New York, where he made preparations for sailing to England. Indeed as early as May, he was contemplating a visit to London as a missionary of Hinduism and had been invited by Miss Henrietta Müller to be her guest there. Mr. E. T. Sturdy, also, hearing of this news from her, wrote a cordial letter asking him to come and live with him. He assured him that there was a great field for his work in London and that he would do everything to arrange the plan of work there. Then again, one of his rich New York friends had invited him to join him in a tour to Paris and to England. Seeing how things were opening out for him he readily accepted this opportunity, to carry to England and to the English people that same great message which he had preached in America and which had aroused the foremost thinkers and representatives of American life and culture to a new order of thought and to a new spiritual outlook.

The Swami needed rest, and he thought that an ocean voyage would be a restorative to tired nerves and an exhausted brain. Therefore, in the middle of August, he sailed from New York, reaching Paris in the latter part of the month. The trip delighted him ; now he was in Paris, the centre of European culture. He made the most of his brief stay by visiting its museums, its churches, its cathedrals, its art galleries, and was pleased to see how artistic instincts were highly developed in the French nation. The tomb of Napoleon, the memories of that great man which are scattered everywhere in Paris filled him with admiration. He was introduced to some of the enlightened friends of his host, with whom he discoursed on subjects which ranged from the highest spirit-

Koyiloor Digital Library

ual to the most learned studies. They became his friends and enjoyed his company, for in himself he was historian, philosopher, wit and entertainer. As was his custom everywhere, in his short stay in Paris he acquainted himself with as much information as possible, asking, studying, observing and acquiring a deeper insight into the culture of the West.

But even though he came to Paris for recreation, thoughts of work crossed his mind. Just before sailing from America he had received a letter from his disciples in India, warning him that missionary activity was strong against him in his native land and that articles and pamphlets were appearing, criticising his life, his teaching and his conduct. Evidently the missionaries had been criticising his diet in the West and many of the Hindus who had read this became opposed to the Swami and attacked him in strong terms. Naturally he was vexed, and, though Paris offered him many distractions, nevertheless these cross-comings intended to upset his work roused him to a righteous wrath. And so he writes from Paris on the day previous to his departure for London, to say :

"• • • I am surprised you take the missionaries' nonsense so seriously. • • • If the people in India want me to keep strictly to my Hindu diet, please tell them to send me a cook and money enough to keep him. This silly *bossism* without a mite of real help makes me laugh. On the other hand, if the missionaries tell you that I have ever broken the two great vows of the Sannyâsin—chastity and poverty,—tell them that they are *big liars.* • • • As for me, mind you, I stand at nobody's dictation. I know my mission in life, and no charivarism about me; I belong as much to the world as to India, no humbug about that. • • • What country has any special claim on me? Am I any nation's slave? • •

"• • • I *see* a greater Power than man, or God, or devil, at my back. I require nobody's help. I have been all my life helping others. • • •

"Do you mean to say I am born to live and die one of those caste-ridden, superstitious, merciless, hypocritical, atheistical *cowards*, that you find only amongst the educated Hindus? I hate cowardice. I will have nothing to do with cowards or political nonsense. I do not believe in any politics. God and truth are the only politics in the world, everything else is trash. • • •"

This letter, written on the ninth of September, shows the Swami in a strong light. He is like another Prophet scourg-

Koviloor Digital Library

ing the Pharisees of his own land, who being of little minds allowed themselves even to take seriously the slanderous statements of those who worked against him with a view to break the backbone of the Hindu Revival, the signs of which were becoming more and more apparent every day. Indeed, by this time missionary activity against the Swami had reached a high pitch. But the Swami was a strong man, and he could be a strong adversary when necessary. He had to be this, for otherwise his religion, his people, his name and his teaching would have been thrown in the mire by cynical or malicious critics. He had literally to fight his way for recognition. And when his character was attacked, he was, for the sake of his teaching, unequivocal in his replies. Oftentimes, however, the Swami felt like a child, and he would weep in the solitude, praying to the Mother for protection and for help. On one occassion, during his early days in America, he was actually seen in tears reading a baseless assertion against his character, and when asked the reason he replied : "Oh ! How deep is the wickedness of the world and to what lengths men would go, in the name of religion, to cast aspersion upon another worker in God's vineyard !" Even many of the Christian clerics were up in arms against the bigotted and slanderous statements which so-called Christian propagandists were heaping upon one whom every fair-minded Christian called "Our Eastern Brother."

As has been seen there were times in America when the Swami's patience was sorely tried by the mischievous criticisms which had been wrought up against him by interested parties, but in most cases he found champions to rise in his defence. In connection with the Pandita Ramabai's efforts in America to raise funds on behalf of her educational work in India, some of her zealous admirers maintained that the Swami had grossly criticised her in his lectures before the Brooklyn Ethical Association. In refutation of this, Dr. Lewis G. Janes, President of the Brooklyn Ethical Association, wrote to *The Standard Union* :—

Koviloor Digital Library

"I heard all the lectures of the Swami Vivekananda which were given under the auspices of the Brooklyn Ethical Association, and to my certain knowledge he never mentioned the name of the Pandita Ramabai in any one of them. After the lecture given in the hall of the Long Island Historical Society, in response to a direct question from some persons in the audience, the Swami replied temperately, saying that he wished well for the educational work of Ramabai, but dissented from some of the methods which she had adopted for obtaining money in this country.

"In one of his lectures at the Pouch Mansion, he also spoke of the Hindu widows, declaring it unjust to state that they were generally subjected to cruelty or oppression in the Indian homes. He admitted that the prejudice against remarriage and the custom which makes the widow a member of the husband's family instead of that of her own parents inflicted some hardships upon widows in India, and favoured all wise efforts for their education which would render them self-supporting, and in this way alleviate their condition. He emphasised his desire for the education and elevation of the women of his country, including the widows, by volunteering to give the entire proceeds of one of his lectures in support of the school of Babu Sashipada Bannerjee at Baranagore, near Calcutta....." In conclusion, Dr. Janes says :—".....In justice to the Swami Vivekananda it should be remembered that his criticisms of Ramabai—never volunteered and seldom uttered in public—were always directed against her unwise methods of exaggeration and wholesale denunciation of her people, and never against her legitimate educational work....."

Now he was bound for England! He was filled with expectations and anticipation. Both in India and in America he had often dreamt of visiting the great metropolis of London, particularly to preach to the English nation concerning Hinduism, which it had either heard of or known only in misrepresented forms from unsympathetic critics. He wondered how the British public would receive him—a Hindu belonging to a subject race, come to preach his religion to them. But this wonder was shortly to give place to a still greater wonder—namely, his unbounded and immediate success. The very sight of London thrilled him. He was received by friends, among others being Mr. Sturdy, and Miss Henrietta Müller whom he had met in America. He soon found himself accommodated now in one and then in another

Kovilloor Digital Library

of the homes of his friends. After a few days' rest he commenced work in a quiet way. During the day he paid visits to every place of historic or artistic interest, while in the morning and often in the late evening he held classes and gave interviews. His reputation spread at once. Visitors poured in. He received numerous invitations; and within three weeks of his arrival he found himself launched into strenuous work. He preached and taught upon the universal theme of the Vedanta and upon the four Margas or paths of the highest spiritual realisation. He was interviewed by several of the leading journals, among them being *The Westminster Gazette*, and *The Standard* which spoke of him and of his teaching in highly complimentary terms.

The Swami's work though intended to be mostly of a private character, soon assumed a public aspect, as the notices incorporating his teaching, that appeared from time to time in the daily journals, attest. People came in numbers to meet the Hindu Yogi, as he was called in London. One of the Swami's great friends at this time who introduced him to numerous persons and immensely assisted him in forming his classes and propagating the Vedanta teaching was Mr. E. T. Sturdy, a man who had long been interested in Indian thought and, indeed, had been in India and undergone severe asceticism in a hill-station in the Himalayas. He was a man of means and learning and position, and his name lent weight among the circle of his friends, who went to the Swami's classes. Among the early visitors to the Swami's class-rooms was the Lady Isabel Margesson and several of the nobility. The Swami worked day in and day out, even as he had done in New York, without respite, giving his whole spirit to those who came to be taught.

Feeling that the London public should hear his philosophy expounded to them, his friends arranged to have him give a public lecture at Princes' Hall, Piccadilly, one of the most fashionable places in the metropolis, on the evening of October 22nd. And so the Swami delivered his address, the subject of which was "Self-Knowledge." When he rose

Koviloor Digital Library

to speak that night, he faced a large gathering of people, representing all the walks of life and some of the best thinkers in the city. The lecture was an instantaneous success, and the next morning the journals were filled with complimentary comments. *The Standard* wrote :—

"Since the days of Ram Mohan Roy, with the single exception of Keshub Chundra Sen, there has not appeared on an English platform a more interesting Indian figure than the Hindu who lectured in Princes' Hall.....In the course of his lecture, he made some remorselessly disparaging criticism on the work that factories, engines, and other inventions and books were doing for man, compared with half-a-dozen words spoken by Buddha or Jesus. The lecture was evidently quite extemporaneous, and was delivered in a pleasing voice free from any kind of hesitation."

The London Daily Chronicle wrote :—

"Vivekananda, the popular Hindu monk, whose physiognomy bore the most striking resemblance to the classic face of Buddha, denounced our commercial prosperity, our bloody wars, and our religious intolerance, declaring that at such a price the mild Hindu would have none of our vaunted civilisation."

Under the title, "An Indian Yogi in London," *The Westminster Gazette* wrote, following upon an interview of one of its correspondents with the Swami :—

" * * The Swami Vivekananda is a striking figure with his turban (or mitre-shaped cap) and his calm but kindly features. * * * His face lights up like that of a child, it is so simple, straightforward and honest."

This interviewer held a long discussion with the Swami wherein the latter instructed him as to why he left the ordinary course of the world and adopted the Sannyâsin life ; the Swami mentioned the name of his Master, and said that he had come to organise no sect, to teach no sectarian doctrine, but to give the general outlines of the eclectic principles of the Vedanta and to let each apply them to his own concrete forms. He said, "I am the exponent of no occult societies, nor do I believe that good can come of such bodies. Truth stands on its own authority, and truth can bear the light of day." The correspondent of the Gazette wrote out all the Swami's ideas and of his brilliant success

Kovilpor Digital Library

in America, and concludes by remarking, "I then took my leave from one of the most original of men that I have had the honour of meeting." Thus the London public were informed of the Swami's being a monk and a teacher, and scores after scores gathered at his quarters, seeking instruction, or desiring to satisfy their curiosity.

It was a novel and satisfying experience for the Swami to have the English people endorse his teaching and his character by this demonstration of enthusiasm. And though he was in London, hardly more than a month following upon his lecture, he succeeded in making a deep and lasting impression upon those whom he met. Among these was Miss Margaret Noble, who later on became known as the Sister Nivedita. She was struck with the novelty and the breadth of his religious culture and the intellectual freshness of his philosophical outlook, as also with the fact that "his call was sounded in the name of that which was strongest and finest, and was not in any way dependent on the meaner elements in man." Both before she met him, and for some time after, Miss Noble was highly interested in educational work, being the principal of a school of her own, and was one of the conspicuous members of the Sesame Club, founded in connection with educational purposes. She moved in quiet but distinguished intellectual circles and was deeply interested in all modern influences and thought. She weighed the Swami's words in the balance and at first found some difficulty in accepting his views; but this, in the Swami's eyes, was a sign of the power of true penetration, for he knew that though now she might hesitate, when she would once accept, there would be no more ardent champion of his ideas than she. It required many months, as she herself confesses, for her complete ripening of thought with reference to the Swami's philosophy to come about. And in her own case she represented in a defined form the difficulty which many others had found and overcome. For, it must be remembered, that the Vedanta ideas, as he analysed them, were necessarily associated with much

CC-0. In Public Domain. Digitized by eGangotri

psychological and philosophical learning. The intellectual moods by which he penetrated into the "Field of Reality" were replete with such expressions as, "Our ego is only a by-product, as it were, of true individuality," or "Matter and mind are aspects of the same Reality, and the goal consists in realising the Self as distinct from the two." Or again, "Maya is a term for a simple statement of the facts about us ; the conquest of Maya consists in a spiritual interpretation of these facts" ; or again, "Through the cross-purposes of desire and selfish personality we cover the Reality with a mist." Or again, when he said, "The Universe is like a cobweb and minds are the spiders, for mind is one as well as many," he was simply talking beyond his listeners', comprehension.

Miss Noble pondered for a long time upon the Swami's words ; and before he left England for America she had already called him "Master." The description of her first meeting with the Swami is charming. She writes :—

"Even in far away London indeed, the first time I saw him, the occasion must have stirred in his mind, as it does in mine, recalling it now, a host of associations connected with his own sun-steeped land. The time was a cold Sunday afternoon in November, and the place, it is true, a West-end drawing-room. But he was seated, facing a half-circle of listeners, with the fire on the hearth behind him, and as he answered question after question, breaking now and then into the chanting of some Sanskrit text in illustration of his reply, the scene must have appeared to him, while twilight passed into darkness, only as a curious variant upon the Indian garden, or on the group of hearers gathered at sundown round the Sâdhu who sits beside the well, or under the tree outside the village-bounds. Never again in England did I see the Swami as a teacher, in such simple fashion. Later, he was always lecturing, or the questions he answered were put with formality by members of larger audiences. Only this first time we were but fifteen or sixteen guests, intimate friends, many of us, and he sat amongst us, in his crimson robe and girdle, as one bringing us news from a far land, with a curious habit of saying now and again 'Shiva ! Shiva !' and wearing that look of mingled gentleness and loftiness, that one sees on the faces of those who live much in meditation, that look, perhaps, that Raphael has painted for us, on the brow of the Sistine Child."

"That afternoon is now ten years ago, and fragments only of the talk come back to me. But never to be forgotten are the Sanskrit verses

Harvard Digital Library

that he chanted for us, in those wonderful Eastern tones, at once so reminiscent of, and yet so different from, the Gregorian music of our own churches."

It was the Swami's commanding, powerful and spiritual personality that captivated the religious aspiration of Miss Noble, and she became a regular attendant at the Swami's lectures and talks given during the period. He was always the sweet, inspiring teacher to all his students.

In the many talks and private lectures which the Swami gave in some of the aristocratic houses and before several clubs during his first stay in London, he invariably preached an eclectic doctrine, or rather he touched upon all the more important tenets of the Hindu Faith, and especially of the Vedanta philosophy. Now he would discuss the theories of Karma and reincarnation, or take up the subjects of Divine Incarnation and the different systems of conceiving and worshipping the Lord in no less than five relationships, and then dilate upon the principles of the four spiritual paths of Jnana or Insight of Oneness, Yoga or Mysticism, Karma or Service and Work without attachment, and Bhakti or Love and Worship. As in America so here also in his London conversaziones, he found himself besieged with questions of various characters, and invariably he was the same brilliant wit and master of repartee and spiritual teacher. He would oftentimes express his lack of confidence in the Western conception of religious organisedness and its love of, and dependence upon money, as opposed to the Hindu idea of absolute freedom in religious belief and pursuits and its glorification of Renunciation. He eloquently pointed out that, "Man proceeds from truth to truth and not from error to truth," and that "It is well to be born in a church, but it is terrible to die there."

The lectures and talks of the Swami were sometimes thrilling and always illuminating in their character. It might be the tense expression on his countenance, or the sudden light of insight in his eyes, or an overpowering consciousness of higher things embodied in a spontaneous and brilliant

Google Digitized by

remark, or the fact that one lost sight entirely of his physical personality in the glowing and fervid vision he portrayed of the beyond-body outlook, that carried the audience off their feet. Probably no other instance sets forth his eloquence and spirit so clearly than that which occurred in a West-end drawing-room where he lectured one evening to a highly cultured audience, composed mostly of fashionable young mothers. He was speaking on the greatness of the path of Love, showing to what heights of selflessness it leads and how it draws out the very best faculties of the soul. In elucidating his remarks, he said, "Suppose, a tiger should suddenly appear before you in the streets. How terror-stricken you would be, and how eager you would all be to fly away for your very lives! But"— and his tone became changed and his face of a sudden lighted up with that strength and fearlessness which the spiritual fire alone endows in its fullest measure,—"Suppose, there were a baby in the path of the tiger! Where would your place be then? At the mouth of the tiger—any one of you—I am sure of it." His hearers were carried away by this splendid remark, at once a compliment to the possibilities within them and the power of arousing their very highest spiritual nature. It was such characteristics as these—his immense personal magnetism, his directness, his lucidity, his vision,—which gave the splendid convincing power to his utterances, and which bound indissolubly to himself, here, there and everywhere, large groups of the very finest and the most devout disciples. No wonder that they regarded him as "Master." The remarkable way in which he classified religious ideas, the great breadth of his intellectual and spiritual culture, the newness and profundity of his ideas, the great ethical import attached to all he said, and, finally, his strength, manliness and fearlessness of spirit, each and all of these were bound to create an indelible impression.

Thus by his first visit to London he laid an unshakable foundation for any future work he might find it fit to initiate. When he intended to visit England he thought it

Kovilpoor Digital Library

would be "only to feel the ground"; but when he was once there he found that his visit was not experimental but practically and immensely successful, beyond all anticipation. The Press had welcomed and heralded his ideas; some of the most select clubs of the city and even some leaders of its prominent clerical institutions had invited him and received him with marked admiration. He was moving in the best circles of English society and even members of the nobility were glad to reckon him as their friend. This completely revolutionised his idea of English men and women. In America he found that the public was most enthusiastic and responsive in taking up new ideas; but in England he discovered that though his hearers were more conservative in their declarations of acceptance and praise, they were all the more fervent and staunch, once they had convinced themselves of the worth of a teacher and his ideas. Before he left London to return to America and take up the threads of work there, he had the joyous satisfaction of being able to count many who had become his sincere friends and earnest supporters. In the middle of November he himself wrote to a disciple in Madras, saying:—

"* * * In England my work is really splendid.....Bands and bands come and I have no room for so many; so they squat on the floor, ladies and all.....I shall have to go away next week, and they are so sorry. Some think my work here will be hurt a little if I go away so soon. I do not think so. I do not depend on men or things. The Lord alone I depend upon—and He works through me. * * * I am really tired from incessant work. Any other Hindu would have died if he had to work as hard as I have to. . . . I want to go to India for a long rest. * * *"

A correspondent of a daily journal, who attended the class lectures of the Swami wrote:—

"It is indeed a rare sight to see some of the most fashionable ladies in London seated on the floor cross-legged, of course, for want of chairs, listening with all the Bhakti of an Indian *chela* towards his Guru. The love and sympathy for India that the Swamiji is creating in the minds of the English-speaking race is sure to be a tower of strength for the progress of India."

Kovilcor Digital Library

In the very midst of his English work, however, the Swami was receiving letters upon letters, saying that the opportunity for American work was on the increase, and begging him to return to America for the sake of his disciples there. His English friends, on the other hand, were repeatedly urging him to remain and to settle permanently in the metropolis. But he felt it would be best for a time to let the seeds already sown in London bide their time to spring forth. Also feeling that he was being called by the Lord, he decided to leave London for the present. He promised to return to England in the following summer and continue the work begun. He was gratified with what he said the Lord had accomplished through him and with a new spirit and with new spiritual invigoration he turned his face again to the group of ardent followers in America. A rich Boston lady had promised to support his work throughout the coming winter in New York, and everything seemed bright and prosperous. Before he left he advised those who were more particularly interested in his teaching to form themselves into a body and to meet regularly for the purpose of reading the Bhagavad-Gita, and other Scriptures of Hinduism. Mr. E. T. Sturdy, writing to *The Brahmavadin*, in the month of February, 1896, of the Swami's visit to England says :—

"The visit of the Swami Vivekananda to England has demonstrated that there exists a thoughtful, educated body of people here, which has only to be found and properly approached, to benefit very largely from the life-giving stream of Indian thought.....

".....Again, from Pulpit utterances, making reference to Swami Vivekananda's expositions here, it was not difficult to see how, through him, some of the more open-minded of the Western clergy, who were fortunate enough to meet him, were able to make application, to their own system of religion, of pure Vedanta teachings.....Swami Vivekananda's classes drew together considerable numbers from the various ranks of English life. The great majority of these carried away with them a clear conviction of his capacity as a teacher. Upon his return to America, in order to keep together the introductory work thus accomplished, classes were set on foot for the reading and study of the Bhagavad-Gitâ and other kindred subjects.....These classes continue.....No

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

introduction is needed.....No society is formed, or will be formed, nor is any money consideration accepted....."

The Swami's success was due to his great art of presenting the supreme insight which he possessed. The above writer has expressed it well when, speaking of the Swami's coming, he says in continuation, ". . . But at length arrives on our shores a *Yogin* coming with love in his heart and the tradition of ages in his memory. . ." In the course of a single interview he would often present to the brilliant thinkers and society people before him an entire series of new ideas which formed the basis of a broad and all-inclusive spiritual life. In some instances it was literally an intellectual upheaval which he created by his exceptionally profound remarks related to the metaphysics of the Vedanta ; and many of his select hearers would admit that it had never before fallen to their lot to meet with a thinker who in one short hour had been able to express all that was the very highest in the way of religious thought. All invariably felt that they were verily in the presence of an Apostle with a message, who was by no means, as so many are, merely the propounder of philosophical tit-bits and intellectual sophistries. They were irresistibly drawn to pay obeisance to the overwhelming character of the man before them. To them he was the herald of advanced ideas, claiming as he did that all religions were true in a very real sense, though they were not true in so far as they drew lines of demarcation and exclusiveness. The Swami always gave them to understand that, though as a religious teacher he had a system of thought to offer, he himself would be the first to change his views if he found that truth led elsewhere. Though some there were who at first hesitated in accepting his teaching in full, they ended, however, in calling the Swami by the devout term of "Master."

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXVII

ESTABLISHING THE AMERICAN WORK.

During the Swami's absence in England, the work of spreading the Vedanta was successfully carried on by his disciples, notably by the Swamis Kripananda and Abhayananda, and by Miss S. E. Waldo. They not only held regular weekly meetings on the Vedanta philosophy in New York which were well-attended, but carried the Swami's message to other cities of the Union. Everywhere they found a ready hearing and succeeded in forming new centres, such as at Buffalo and Detroit, where earnest truth-seekers continued the work with zeal and devotion. After three months' absence the Swami arrived at New York in excellent health and spirits on Friday, December the sixth. His visit to England and his energetic work there, though a strenuous experience, had been most pleasant. Together with the Swami Kripananda, he now made his headquarters in Thirty-ninth Street. They occupied two spacious rooms which could accommodate as many as one hundred and fifty persons. The lady who had promised him help was hindered in giving it. But the Swami did not depend on men and things for his success. It was now that he set himself to the task of preaching Karma Yoga in particular, and gave all those lessons that are embodied in the book known as "Karma Yoga", which is regarded by some as his masterpiece. For two weeks he worked incessantly, giving as many as seventeen class lectures a week, besides carrying on a voluminous correspondence and granting numerous private audiences. The subjects of some of the lectures given at this time were (1) The Claims of Religion: Its Truth and Utility. (2) The Ideal of a Universal Religion: How it must embrace different types of minds and methods. (3) The Cosmos: The Order of Creation and Dissolution. (4) Cosmos (continued).

Kovilor Digital Library

The disciples of the Swami were eager from the first to have his extempore lectures recorded, as he made no effort to preserve his own teachings. Therefore towards the end of the year 1895, a stenographer was engaged to report his lectures. But it was found that he could not keep up with the Swami ; it was difficult for him to do so, especially because of his lack of acquaintance with the subject. Another was engaged with the same results. Finally, through some strange chance, one J. J. Goodwin, who had recently come to New York from England was engaged ; and the result was surprising. He transcribed exactly and accurately all the utterances of the Swami. A man of the world, with a variegated experience, this gentleman forsook the worldly life and all worldly pursuits almost from the moment that his eyes fell upon the Master. The Swami told him many incidents of his past life, and this created such a moral revolution in him that thenceforth his whole life was changed. He became a most ardent disciple, even to the point of attending to the Swami's personal needs. He would work day and night over the Swami's lectures, taking them down stenographically and then typewriting them, all in the same day, in order to hand over the manuscripts to the newspapers for publication and to be prepared for the same work on the day following. The Swami prized "my faithful Goodwin" as he was wont to speak of him, and Goodwin accompanied him wheresoever he went, visiting Detroit and Boston, when the Swami went to those places in the spring of the year 1896, and later accompanying him to England and even to India, where he died. At his demise the Swami was heard to remark, "Now my right hand is gone. My loss is incalculable." It may be said here that the Swami was comparatively little given to writing. He spoke freely and always extempore and therefore, with the exception of his work on "Raja Yoga", he has left behind him little philosophical writing in his own hand.

Towards the end of the month the Swami took advantage of the Christmas holidays to pay a visit to Boston, as the guest of Mrs. Ole Bull. Returning from there he at once

Koviloor Digital Library

commenced in New York a series of stirring public lectures at Hardeman Hall, on Sundays, beginning from January the fifth, which were given free of charge. His lectures before the Metaphysical Society in Brooklyn and the People's Church in New York drew crowds of listeners and were highly appreciated. Besides these public lectures he continued to hold his private classes twice daily, and the attendance at them was now increasing beyond all expectations. Those who came to the public lectures came also to the Vedanta head-quarters; and in Hardeman Hall, when the Swami spoke, oftentimes there was not even as much as standing room. He was called the "lightning orator," and soon his fame as a public lecturer in New York spread so widely that it was deemed wise to rent Madison Square Garden, a huge hall, with a seating capacity of over fifteen hundred, for the second series of lectures which he gave in February. The subjects were "Bhakti Yoga," "The Real and the Apparent Man," and "My Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa." In February, he was also invited to lecture before the Metaphysical Society at Hartford, Coun., which he accepted, and spoke on "Soul and God". Of this lecture, *The Hartford Daily Times* wrote:—

"His views are more in consonance with those of Christ than those of many so-called Christians. His broad charity takes in all religions and all nations. The simplicity of his talk last night was charming, and in his long red gown and yellow turban, with his handsome Asiatic face, he was picturesque to the eye as well as fascinating to the ear through his high spiritual ideas. He speaks excellent English and with an accent that gave an added zest to his talk."

In February he also lectured before the Ethical Society of Brooklyn. His lectures aroused everywhere an enormous wave of enthusiasm and *The New York Herald*, the leading paper of New York, mentioning the character of the Swami's work, in the latter part of January, 1896, said :—

"Swami Vivekananda is a name to conjure with in certain circles of New York society to-day—and those not the least wealthy or intellectual. It is borne by a dusky gentleman from India, who for the last twelve months has been making name and fame for himself in this metropolis by the propagation of certain forms of Oriental religion, philosophy

Kovilo Digital Library

and practice. Last winter his campaign centred in the reception room of a prominent hotel on Fifth Avenue. Having gained for his teaching and himself a certain vogue in society, he now aims to reach the common people and for that reason is giving a series of free lectures on Sunday afternoons at Hardeman Hall.

"Sufficient success has attended the efforts of Swami Vivekananda. . . . Of his early life he never speaks, save to talk in a general way about the great Master who taught him the doctrines and practices he is now trying to introduce in this country.

". . . . His manner is undoubtedly attractive, and he is possessed of a large amount of personal magnetism. One has but to glance at the grave, attentive faces of the men and women who attend his classes to be convinced that it is not the man's subject alone that attracts and holds his disciples. . ."

The New York Herald reporter, after giving a description of the Swami and his work in the United States continues as follows :—

"When I visited one of the Swami's classes recently, I found present a well-dressed audience of intellectual appearance. Doctors and lawyers, professional men and society ladies were among those in the room.

"Swami Vivekananda sat in the centre, clad in an ochre-coloured robe. The Hindu had his audience divided on either side of him and there were between fifty and a hundred persons present. The class was on Karma Yoga.....

"Following the lecture or instruction, the Swami held an informal reception, and the magnetism of the man was shown by the eager manner in which those who had been listening to him, hastened to shake hands or begged for the favour of an introduction. But concerning himself the Swami will not say more than is absolutely necessary. Contrary to the claim made by his pupils, he declares that he has come to this country alone and not as officially representing any order of Hindu monks. He belongs to the Sannyâsis, he will say, and is hence free to travel without losing his caste. . . ." (for a Sannyâsin has no caste).

Describing the Swami's personality at this time, Helen Huntington wrote to *The Brahmavâdin* from Brooklyn :—

". . . . But it has pleased God to send to us out of India a spiritual guide—a teacher whose sublime philosophy is slowly and surely permeating the ethical atmosphere of our country; a man of extraordinary power and purity, who has demonstrated to us a very high plane of spiritual living, a religion of universal, unfailing charity, self-renunciation, and

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

the purest sentiments conceivable by the human intellect. The Swami Vivekananda has preached to us a religion that knows no bonds of creed and dogmas, is uplifting, purifying, infinitely comforting and altogether without blemish,—based on the love of God and man and on absolute chastity. . . . .

"Swami Vivekananda has made many friends outside the circle of his followers ; he has met all phases of society on equal terms of friendship and brotherhood ; his classes and lectures have been attended by the most intellectual people and advanced thinkers of our cities ; and his influence has already grown into a deep, strong undercurrent of spiritual awakening. No praise or blame has moved him to either approbation or expostulation ; neither money nor position has influenced or prejudiced him. Towards demonstrations of undue favouritism he has invariably maintained a priestly attitude of inattention, checking foolish advances with a dignity impossible to resist, blaming not any but wrong-doers and evil-thinkers, exhorting only to purity and right living. He is altogether such a man as 'kings delight to honour.'"

The Swami Kripananda, in a letter dated 19th February, 1896, to *The Brahmavâdin*, describing the influence exercised by the Swami at this time, writes as follows :—

"Since my last letter (of January 31st.) an immense amount of work has been accomplished by our beloved teacher in the furtherance of our great cause. The wide interest awakened by his teaching, is shown in the ever-increasing number of those who attend the class lessons and the large crowds that come to hear his public Sunday-lectures. The physical and mental energy he displays in disseminating the true Hindu spirituality in this country . . . . seems exhaustless and fills with awe and admiration all those who have occasion to witness his gigantic efforts ; lecturing twice a day, carrying on a vast correspondence, giving interviews and private instructions and preparing literature for the guidance of his followers—all this fills his time from the early morning till late at night, and would long ago have broken down his iron constitution, were it not for his powerful will, nourished by his love for mankind, that gives him the strength to cheerfully carry on his difficult task.

" . . . . Thus, our teacher gives us in his own person the example of a true Karmayogin, just as in other respects, he proves himself a perfect Bhakta and Jnanin, and as such a worthy disciple of his great Master, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, whose ideal was the harmonious union in one character of these three great types of humanity.

"To supply the great demand for some literature on the Swami's teachings, several of his Sunday lectures have been published in pamphlet form at a nominal price hardly sufficient to cover the expenses.

Koviloor Digital Library

They sell very rapidly and thus help to carry the Vedanta into regions where the existence of this wonderful system of thought, was, perhaps, never before dreamed of. Eight of the Swami's class lessons on Karma Yoga are in the Press about to be published in book form, a sufficient number of copies to pay the cost being already subscribed for in advance. In this work the Swami was greatly assisted by several of his Grihastha followers whose unselfish efforts, on behalf of the furtherance of our movement, cannot be commended enough. . . .

". . . .The strong current of religious thought sent out in his lectures and writings, the powerful impetus given by his teachings to the pursuit of truth without regard to inherited superstitions and prejudices, though working silently and unconsciously, is exercising a beneficial and lasting effect on the popular mind and so becoming an important factor in the spiritual uplifting of society. Its most palpable manifestation is shown in the growing demand for Vedantic literature and the frequent use of Sanskrit terms by people from whom one would least expect to hear them : *Atman*, *Purusha*, *Prakriti*, *Moksha*, and similar expressions have acquired full citizenship, and the names of Sankaracharya and Ramanuja are becoming with many almost as familiar as Huxley and Spencer. The public libraries are running after everything that has reference to India : the books of Max Muller, Colebrooke, Deusser., Burnouf, and of all the authors that have ever written in English on Hindu philosophy, find a ready sale ; and even the dry and tiresome Schopenhauer, on account of his Vedantic background, is being studied with great eagerness.

"People are quick to appreciate the grandeur and beauty of a system which, equally as a philosophy and a religion, appeals to the heart as well as to the reason, and satisfies all the religious cravings of human nature ; especially so, when it is being expounded by one who, like our teacher, with his wonderful oratory is able to rouse at will the dormant love of the divinely sublime in the human soul, and with his sharp and irrefutable logic to easily convince the most stubborn mind of the most scientific matter-of-fact man. No wonder, therefore, that this interest in Hindu thought is to be met with among all classes of society. . . ."

It was during this period that the Swami was giving his class lessons on "Bhakti Yoga"and a series of lectures on "Jnana Yoga" and on "Sankhya and Vedanta." He closed his public lectures at Madison Square Garden on the 24th. of February with an inspired lecture on "My Master," which has become famous as a masterpiece of eloquence and as a glorious tribute to his Gurudeva. It so happened that this was the very date of the public celebration of Sri Rama-

Koviloor Digital Library

krishna's birthday anniversary in India. On Thursday, the 20th, several young men and women took *mantrams* and on the preceding Thursday, the 13th, Dr. Street, a devout disciple, was initiated by the Swami as a Sannyâsin, with the name of Yogananda. The impressive ceremony was performed in the presence of the other Sannyâsi and Brahmachâri disciples. The fact that the Swami had made three Sannyâsins within one year, that three men representing learning, position and culture, should have abandoned the world and the worldly life, taking the vows of chastity and poverty and obedience, showed how he had brought home, to some at least in that land of worldly enjoyment, a strong conviction of the necessity of renunciation as the only means of realising the Truth. The Press regarded this fact as "one of the most marvellous evidences of the Swami's powerful influence for good" over those who came into personal contact with him. It naturally gave a tremendous impetus to his work. People saw that his influence was literally enormous and that he was indeed a Master. Many who had been only admirers, now became the Swami's personal disciples, and expressed a strong desire to be initiated by him into Brahmacharyam. The Swami Kripananda concludes the letter quoted above by saying in a half-humoros way :—

"By the way, India had better at once make clear her title to the ownership of the Swami. They are about to write his biography for the national Encyclopedœa of the United States of America, thus making of him an American citizen. The time may come when even as seven cities disputed with each other for the honour of having given birth to Homer, seven countries may claim our Master as theirs, and thus rob India of the honour of producing one of the noblest of her children."

The New York Herald, speaking of his work again in a later issue, said :—

"There can be no question that the Swami is securing an influential following. Many clergymen have attended his lectures. Indeed, he was invited to lecture before the Dixon Society by Dr. Wright. Some of those who are his pupils are well-known in the city. Among the names of those recorded at the Swami's house were Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett, Madame Antoinette Sterling, Dr. Allen Day, Miss Emma Thursby and Professor Wyman. Mrs. Ole Bull is also

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

one of his disciples. The Swami has just received an invitation from Mr. John P. Fox to lecture before the Harvard Graduate Philosophical Club. Here he lectures twice daily on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, in addition to his public lectures on Sunday afternoon."

Mrs. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, one of the foremost poets and writers of America and one of the most representative women in the world, referring to her meeting with the Swami, wrote as follows to the *New York American* of May 26th., 1907 :—

"Twelve years ago I chanced one evening to hear that a certain teacher of philosophy from India, a man named Vivekananda, was to lecture a block from my home in New York.

"We went out of curiosity (the Man whose name I bear and I), and before we had been ten minutes in the audience we felt ourselves lifted up into an atmosphere so rarified, so vital, so wonderful, that we sat spell-bound and almost breathless, to the end of the lecture.

"When it was over we went out with new courage, new hope, new strength, new faith, to meet life's daily vicissitudes. 'This is the Philosophy, this is the idea of God, the religion which I have been seeking,' said the Man. And for months afterwards he went with me to hear Swami Vivekananda explain the old religion and to gather from his wonderful mind jewels of truth and thoughts of helpfulness and strength. It was that terrible winter of financial disasters, when banks failed and stocks went down like broken balloons and business men walked through the dark valleys of despair and the whole world seemed topsy-turvy—just such an era as we are again approaching. Sometimes after sleepless nights of worry and anxiety, the Man would go with me to hear the Swami lecture, and then he would come out into the winter gloom and walk down the street smiling and say, 'It is all right. There is nothing to worry over.' And I would go back to my own duties and pleasures with the same uplifted sense of soul and enlarged vision.

"When any philosophy, any religion, can do this for human beings in this age of stress and strain, and when, added to that, it intensifies their faith in God and increases their sympathies for their kind and gives them a confident joy in the thought of other lives to come, it is a good and great religion."

And not only did this celebrated lady meet the Swami, but she became "a devout pupil of the old beautiful Religion of India, as taught by Vivekananda." She writes further in conclusion :—

"We need to learn the greatness of the philosophy of India.

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri

to enlarge our narrow creeds with the wisdom religious. But we want to imbue them with our own modern spirit of progress, and to apply them practically, lovingly and patiently to human needs. Vivekananda came to us with a message. . . 'I do not come to convert you to a new belief' he said. 'I want you to keep your own belief; I want to make the Methodist a better Methodist; the Presbyterian a better Presbyterian; the Unitarian a better Unitarian. I want to teach you to live the truth, to reveal the light within your own soul.' He gave the message that strengthened the man of business, that caused the frivolous society woman to pause and think; that gave the artist new aspirations; that imbued the wife and mother, the husband and father, with a larger and holier comprehension of duty."

In fact, many famous philosophers and scientists, and the very best of New York's social representatives attended the Swami's lectures or came to his rooms to see him and went away filled with a new spiritual vision and a luminous insight In a letter dated the 17th. of February he wrote to his friends in India that he had succeeded in rousing the very heart of American civilisation. This was literally true; thousands of persons of all classes had heard his message and had not only appreciated it, but had actually proclaimed themselves as Vedantins and as his disciples. Thus he was highly gratified that his desire of reaching the people was fulfilled. He had by this time concluded his class lectures on Râja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga, which were, by the labours of Mr. Goodwin, ready for the Press; besides, several of his Sunday lectures had already appeared in pamphlet form.

Having thus finished his work in New York the Swami left on invitation to Detroit to hold classes and lectures for two weeks. Of this period of work, Mrs. Funke writes :—

".....He was accompanied by his stenographer, the faithful Goodwin. They occupied a suite of rooms at *The Richelieu*, a small family hotel, and had the use of the large drawing-room for class work and lectures. The room was not large enough to accommodate the crowds and to our great regret many were turned away. The room, as also the hall, staircase and library were literally packed. At that time he was all Bhakti—the love for God was a hunger and a thirst with him. A kind of divine madness seemed to take possession of him, as if his heart would burst with longing for the Beloved Mother.

Kovilloor Digital Library

"His last public appearance in Detroit was at the Temple Beth El of which the Rabbi Louis Grossman, an ardent admirer of the Swami, was the pastor. It was Sunday evening and so great was the crowd that we almost feared a panic. There was a solid line reaching far out into the street and hundreds were turned away. Vivekananda held the large audience spell-bound, his subject being, 'India's Message to the West,' and 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion.' He gave us a most brilliant and masterly discourse. Never had I seen the Master look as he looked that night. There was something in his beauty not of earth. It was as if the spirit had almost burst the bonds of flesh and it was then that I first saw a foreshadowing of the end. He was much exhausted from years of overwork, and it was even then to be seen that he was not long for this world. I tried to close my eyes to it, but in my heart I knew the truth. He had needed rest but felt that he must go on."

Of his success in Detroit another disciple wrote to *The Brahmavâdin* as follows :—

"In spite of the many attacks of the Missionaries, his classes and public lectures were attended to overcrowding. Rabbi Grossman proffered the use of the Temple Beth El, but it could not hold the great crowd, so that hundreds of people had to leave without hearing the great Hindu preacher. The Rabbi, in other respects too, proved his liberality and great friendship for the Swami by taking up his defence against the attacks of the clergymen in the newspapers. His introduction of the Swami in the Temple was one grand eulogy of the Hindus and Hinduism. .....In Detroit, too, several persons joined the children of Ramakrishna. The Swami left Detroit for Boston, Mass., after a fortnight's successful preaching, leaving behind him Kripananda to continue his work in this city."

The next vision of the Swami—one of the most remarkable incidents of his whole American career—is before the graduate students of the philosophical department of Harvard University. Mr. Fox had invited him earlier in the year to present his ideas and his philosophy to this society, one of the foremost intellectual bodies in the world. The Swami had accepted the invitation, and thus on March 25th, he spoke on the "Philosophy of the Vedanta" in such a profound manner as to create an indelible impression on the minds of the professors. Indeed, they offered him a Chair of Eastern philosophy in that celebrated University. But he could not accept this as he was a Sannyâsin. It was a trying experience

Koviloor Digital Library

for the Swami to speak before this great critical gathering; but he was at his best and his interpretation of his philosophy excited the most hearty commendation. Indeed, the Rev. C. C. Everett, D. D., L. L. D., of Harvard University, in the introduction of the pamphlet, embodying the Swami's address and a record of his answers to questions together with the discussion which followed before that institution, has written thus :—

"The Swami Vivekananda was sent by his friends and co-religionists to present their belief at the Congress of Religions that was held in connection with the World's Fair in Chicago. This he did in a way to win general interest and admiration. Since then he has lectured on the same theme in different parts of our country. He has been in fact a missionary from India to America. Everywhere he has made warm personal friends ; and his expositions of Hindu philosophy have been listened to with delight. It is very pleasant to observe the eager interest with which his own people in India follow his course and the joy they take in his success. I have seen a pamphlet filled with speeches made at a large and influential meeting in Calcutta, which was called together to express enthusiastic approval of the manner in which he has fulfilled his mission and satisfaction at this invasion of the West by Oriental thought. This satisfaction is well grounded. We may not be so near to actual conversion as some of these speakers seem to believe ; but Vivekananda has created a high degree of interest in himself and his work. There are indeed few departments of study more attractive than the Hindu thought. It is a rare pleasure to see a form of belief that to most seems so far away and unreal as the Vedanta system, represented by an actually living and extremely intelligent believer. This system is not to be regarded merely as a curiosity, as a speculative vagary. Hegel said that Spinozism is the necessary beginning of all philosophising. This can be said even more emphatically of the Vedanta system. We Occidentals busy ourselves with the manifold. We can, however, have no understanding of the manifold, if we have no sense of the One in which the manifold exists. The reality of the One is the truth which the East may well teach us ; and we owe a debt of gratitude to Vivekananda that he has taught this lesson so effectively."

His answers to the graduating class in philosophy at Harvard were full of penetration, wit, eloquence and philosophical freshness and vitality. In his address he had given a remarkably clear exposition of the cosmology and general principles of the Vedanta, showing the points of reconcilia-

Kovilloor Digital Library

tion between the theories of science concerning matter and force and the statements of the Vedanta in the same regard. He had answered questions asked in a critical spirit appertaining to the influence of Hindu on Stoic philosophy, to caste, to the relation between Advaita and Dvaita, to the theory of the Absolute, and to the contrast between self-hypnotism and Râja Yoga. Speaking of the latter, the Swami remarked that Oriental psychology was infinitely more thorough than the Occidental, asserting that man is already hypnotised and that Yoga is an effort at de-hypnotisation of self. He said, ... "It is the Advaitist alone that does not care to be hypnotised. His is the only system that more or less understands that hypnotism comes with every form of dualism. But the Advaitist says, throw away even the Vedas, throw away even the Personal God, throw away even the universe, throw away even your own body and mind, and let nothing remain, in order to get rid of hypnotism perfectly. . . ." Asked concerning the Yoga powers, the Swami replied that the highest form of Yoga power manifested itself in a Vedanta character and in the continuous perception of divinity as exemplified in the instance of "a Yogi" (Pavhari Baba) "who was bitten by a cobra, and who fell down on the ground. In the evening he revived, and when asked what happened he said, 'A messenger came from my Beloved.' All hatred and anger and jealousy have been burned out of this man. Nothing can make him react ; he is infinite love all the time, and he is omnipotent in his power of love. That is the real Yogi." He added that the highest spiritual power embodied itself in a demonstration of spiritual freedom and in a constant accession of spiritual vision and insight, the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi being the climax thereof. When asked by the professors, "What is the Vedantic idea of civilisation ?" the Swami made answer that true civilisation was the manifestation of the divinity within, and that that land was the most civilised wherein the highest ideals became practical.

The Harvard professors, and, indeed, all those who came

Kovilloor Digital Library

into contact with him, found that the Swami Vivekananda's philosophy was more of a highly moral and emotional rather than of a purely intellectual character. True, it included logic and philosophical form, but in its essential nature it was religion, holding forth realisation and spiritual freedom as the result of the transmutation of purely personal into spiritual faculty. Wheresoever he went, whensoever he taught, he was always confronted with a host of questions, and his answers, being always extempore, kept him constantly on the intellectual *qui vive*, his Harvard experience being only one out of many hundreds. Whatever the question asked, the Swami's answer invariably tallied with his perception of the relation between the question and actual realisation. In all his teaching in America, and for that in England as well, the Swami's main theme is found to be that of the Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy of Infinite Oneness, in which all manifoldness is lost or metamorphosed, and by which human personality is transfigured in the revelation of Pure Divinity. In the Advaita, the Swami taught, there is no dependence, all fear is blotted out, and only the light shines forth,—the Light of the Self-manifested Soul.

It is necessary to quote here excerpts from *The Boston Transcript*, as it noted his activities during his stay in Boston and gave a summary of the lectures delivered there. It wrote :—

"The Swami Vivekananda has, during the past few days, conducted a most successful work in connection with the Procopia. During this time he has given four class lectures for the Club itself, with constant audiences of between four and five hundred people, at the Allen Gymnasium, 44 St. Botolph Street, two at the house of Mrs. Ole Bull in Cambridge, and one before the professors and graduate students of the philosophical department of Harvard University.

".....One of his lectures during the week has been, 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion'.....The Swami is not a preacher of theory. If there is any one feature of the Vedanta philosophy, which he propounds, which appears especially refreshing, it is its intense capability of practical demonstration. We have become almost wedded to the idea that religion is a sublime theory which can be brought into practice and made tangible for us only in another life, but the Swami shows us

Kovilpur Digital Library

the folly of this. In preaching the Divinity of Man he inculcates a spirit of strength into us which will have none of those barriers between this life and actual realisation of the sublime that, to the ordinary man, appear as insurmountable."

It seems that wherever the Swami went he spoke on "The Ideals of a Universal Religion," a religion of principles, whose background should be the Advaita, and whose forms should be those most suitable to the individual temperament of separate nations and personalities. Quoting the sum and substance of the Swami's lectures during the month of March on Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and the one on the Vedanta Philosophy before the Harvard University, the journal concludes, dealing with his lecture on Râja Yoga at Boston, by saying :—

"In discussing Râja Yoga, the psychological way to union with God, the Swami expanded upon the power to which the mind can attain through concentration, both in reference to the physical and the spiritual world. It is the one method that we have in all knowledge. From the lowest to the highest, from the smallest worm to the highest sage, they have to use this one method. The astronomer uses it in order to discover the mysteries of the skies, the chemist in his laboratory, the professor in his chair. This is the one call, the one knock, which opens the gates of nature and lets out the floods of light. This is the one key, the only power—concentration. In the present state of our bodies we are so much distracted, the mind is frittering away its energies upon a hundred sorts of things. By scientific control of the forces which work the body this can be done, and its ultimate effect is realisation. Religion cannot consist of talk. It only becomes religion when it becomes tangible, and until we strive to feel that of which we talk so much, we are no better than agnostics, for the latter are sincere and we are not.

"The Twentieth Century Club had the Swami as their guest on Saturday, and heard an address from him on the 'Practical Side of the Vedanta Philosophy.' He leaves Boston to-day and will within a few days sail for England *en route* for India."

The Swami was physically worn out by this time. He had worked to the point of tension, and yet, strange to say, one does not find him flagging in the least. After closing his public lectures in New York in the latter part of February, 1896, the Swami consolidated his American work by organising the Vedanta movement into a definite society and by

Koviloor Digital Library

issuing his teachings in book form. Thus came into existence "The Vedanta Society of New York" of which he was the founder, and which promulgated itself as a non-sectarian body whose aim was the preaching and realisation of the Vedanta with its contents of such principles as applied to all religions. It invited members of all religious creeds and organisations to become its members, without necessarily changing their faith. The watchwords of toleration and universality of all religions were its motto and described its general character. Its members became known as "Vedantins" and met regularly at appointed times for the purpose of carrying on co-operative and organised work, and for the study and propagation of the Vedanta literature.

Already the Swami's great works known as "Râja Yoga," "Bhakti Yoga" and "Karma Yoga" were published and these almost immediately attained to a wide circulation. The American journals received and reviewed these works favourably and the book, "Râja Yoga" aroused a considerable discussion among the psychologists and physiologists of some of the leading Universities.

More and more as time went on, the Swami had found it necessary to systematise his religious ideas; and for doing this he felt that he would necessarily have to reorganise the entire Hindu philosophical thought by unifying its distinctive features round a few leading ideas of Hindu religious systems, so as to make it more readily intelligible to Western minds. He wanted to bring out according to different schools of Vedanta, the ideas of the soul and the Divinity or final goal, the relation of matter and force and the Vedantic conception of cosmology, and how they coincided with modern science. He also intended to draw up a classification of the Upanishads according to the passages which have a distinct bearing on the Advaita, Visishtadvaita and the Dvaita conceptions, in order to show how all of them can be reconciled. His constructive genius thus roused made him desirous to write a book, carefully working out all these ideas in a definite form. The theme he desired to elucidate he speaks of

Koviloor Digital Library

as his *discovery* in his letter of the 6th of May (*vide* page 369). That he had this idea all along in his brain is shown by a letter which he wrote from England in 1896, saying that he was busy collecting passages from the various Vedas bearing on the Vedanta in its threefold aspects. For this reason he had been writing constantly to India for the Vedanta Sutras with the Bhashyas of all the sects, as also the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Puranas. When these works came his first task, he thought, would be to remodel the Indian thought-forms therein contained so as to be acceptable to the modernised intellect of the West. So anxious was he to accomplish this work that he wrote from England to a disciple in Madras :—

"You can help me by getting some one to collect passages bearing on, first, the Advaitist idea, then, the Visishtadvaitic and the Dvaitist, from the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Puranas. They should be classified and very legibly written with the name and chapter of the book, in each case. It would be a pity to leave the West without leaving something of the philosophy in book-form.

"There was a book published in Mysore in Tamil characters, comprising all the one hundred and eight Upanishads ; I saw it in Professor Deussen's library. Is there a reprint of the same in Devanagri? If so, send me a copy. If not, send me the Tamil edition, and also write on a sheet the Tamil letters and compounds, and all juxtaposed with its Nagri equivalents, so that I may learn the Tamil letters."

And his aim was, as he himself had written long before to one of his disciples :—

"To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry Philosophy and intricate Mythology and queer startling Psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task which only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life ; out of hopelessly intricate Mythology must come concrete moral forms ; and out of bewildering Yogiism must come the most scientific and practical Psychology—and all this must be put into a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work. The Lord only knows how far I shall succeed. To work we have the right, not to the fruits thereof. It is hard work, my boy, hard work ! * * "

Yes, to be sure, the task was Herculean ; but certainly

Koviloor Digital Library

the Swami had carried out his intention. His experience in the West and his constant meditation on religious matters, drew out of him surprisingly original observations upon Indian philosophy, which culminated in his bringing about later on in India itself, a thorough restatement of Indian ideas. And it may be said without dispute that, in an especial sense he was the first of Indian philosophers to prove the Hindu spiritual ideas to be truly scientific as well; and it was he alone who has shown the net-work of philosophical truths behind the Pouranic and mythological forms of Hinduism.

By the time he went to Thousand Island Park he had with him the Bhashyas of all the sects, and all his philosophical writings and utterances were, as it were, so many commentaries upon these, which were remarkably original in their expression. He would accept no authority as final, "knowing full well how each commentator, in turn, had twisted the texts to suit his own meaning." Whensoever he made comments in his classes upon the Vedas or other sacred Scriptures of Hinduism, he was invariably found to throw a whole world of light and revelation upon the texts. He was aware that the logical forms prevalent in philosophical Hinduism needed recasting to suit the terms and demands of present-day scientific thought. The philosophical spirit, he knew, was eternal and unimpeachable, but the logical forms might be questioned, and so he set himself to the task of reorganising Hindu logic, as well. And no better instance of this reorganising tendency is more noticeable than in his utterances in answer to questions asked by the Harvard University professors. As for example, when he had been asked, "Why does Maya, or Ignorance, exist?" he answered, "*Why*,—cannot be asked beyond the limit of causation. It can only be asked within Maya. We say we will answer the question when it is logically formulated." When his questioners said that *Samâdhi* would mean merging the subject in the object, he quickly replied, "Merging the object in the subject, not merging the subject in the object. Really this world dies and *I* remain. I am the only one that remains", using the

Koviloor Digital Library

term "*I*" in its impersonal or absolute sense. Another instance of the readiness of his logic occurred when he was asked, "Is the Advaita antagonistic to Dualism?" He replied, "The Upanishads not being in a systematised form, it was easy for philosophers to take up texts where they liked to form a system. Therefore the Upanishads had always to be taken, else there would be no basis. Yet we find all the different schools of thought in the Upanishads. Our solution is, that the Advaita is not antagonistic to the Dualistic. We say the latter is only one of three steps. Religion always takes three steps. The first is dualism. Then man gets to a higher state, partial non-dualism. And at last he finds he is one with the universe. Therefore the three do not contradict, but fulfil."

One of the Swami's purposes in organising his classes into a society, besides carrying on the spiritual work he had commenced, was *particularly* to bring about an interchange of ideals and ideas between the East and the West. He wanted centres of vital and continual communication between the two worlds and to make "open doors, as it were, through which the East and the West could pass freely back and forth, without a feeling of strangeness, as from one home to another." Already he had in his mind the plan of bringing some of the Brothers of the Ramakrishna Order to teach and preach in America, and also of having some of his American and English disciples go to India and teach and preach there. In America it would be a religious teaching, and in India it would be a practical teaching, a message of science, industry, economics, applied sociology, organisation and co-operation. Day and night the Swami pondered on the means and ways of reconciling these two great worlds,—the East and the West,—and in a form of prophetic vision, he would often tell his American followers, that the time would come when the lines of demarcation, both in thought and in ideal, between the two would be obliterated. He had long since, when he was in England, written to the Swami Saradananda that he desired him to come to the West, but for one reason or another the plans for his departure were delayed.

Kovilloor Digital Library

In the spring of 1896 letters came pouring in to the Swami, beseeching him to come to England again and to systematise the work he had initiated there. He had also himself felt the urgent need of doing so; and it was this reason which actuated him to organise his New York work all the sooner. New York, being the metropolis of America, and London being the metropolis of England, he knew that if he could leave organised societies in both these cities, the work of acquainting the whole English-speaking Western world with his message would in time become a definite possibility. With this object in view, he was also training such of his disciples of whom he could be sure. Thus upon Miss S.E. Waldo, who became known as "Sister Haridasi," the Swami conferred spiritual powers and authority, saying that she alone, of all others, was best able to teach the practice and philosophy of Râja Yoga. Then, too, he had been carefully training the Swamis Kripananda, Abhayananda and Yogananda and a number of Brahmacharins into an intimate and learned acquaintance with the Vedanta philosophy, in its threefold aspects. And there were those of his disciples who were achieving a true insight into his message. Upon all these he was relying to further the cause of the Vedanta during his intended absence in England, and subsequently in India, for he had made up his mind to sail in the middle of April for Europe, and, having finished his work there, to sail for his motherland.

Before leaving New York he made Mr. Francis H. Leggett, one of the wealthy and influential residents of the city, the President of the Vedanta Society. The other offices were occupied by the Swami's initiate disciples. Among those who counted themselves as eager workers in his cause at this time were Miss Mary Phillips, a lady prominent among many circles in woman's charitable and intellectual work in the metropolis, Mrs. Arthur Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Goodyear, and Miss Emma Thursby, the famous singer. The chief members of the Society had been urging upon the Swami the advisability of sending for one

Koviloor Digital Library

of his *gurubhâis* to conduct his classes and work in general during his absence, and the Swami, abiding by their wishes, wrote definitely to the Swami Saradananda, sometime before his return to England asking him to come to London at once as the guest of Mr. E. T. Sturdy.

On the fifteenth of April the Swami sailed for England from New York.

Koviloor Digital Library

LXXXVIII

THE ODDS AND ENDS OF AMERICAN WORK.

Though he was constantly in a whirlwind of work, the Swami Vivekananda delighted in hours of rest and leisure when he could throw off his burden of teaching and preaching. He was often under a great strain, but he could enjoy himself at times like a child, tired of restraint. The giving of his message was, in his case, the giving of his life's blood. Nothing interested him more in times of mental and physical weariness than to "talk nonsense" and be amused. He would take up a copy of "Punch" or some other comic paper and laugh till the tears rolled from his eyes. He demanded diversion of mind, because he knew that there was the tendency in him to drift into serious moods of thought ; and those who loved him were glad at heart when they saw him joyous as a child at play.

He heartily enjoyed a good story. He never forgot any such told to him and would use it himself to the amusement of others when occasion arose. As for example may be cited a few here told by his Western disciples. A lady whose husband was a friend of the Swami and who took him for his first sleigh ride, came to know him closely when she and the Swami were guests of Mrs. Bagley at Amisquam, in August of 1894. She writes to the Sister Nivedita :—

"We were friends at once.....He lectured only once at Amisquam. It was his holiday time.....He used to turn to me and say, 'Tell me a story.' I remember he was greatly amused by a tale about a Chinaman who had been arrested for stealing pork and who, in reply to the Justice who remarked that he thought Chinamen did not eat pork, said, 'Oh ! Me Melican man now. Me, Sir, me steal, me eat pork, me everything.' How often I have heard Vivekananda say, *sotto voce*, 'Me Melican man.' These things would seem trifling to anyone who had not known the Swami as you have. But, nothing which concerned him could seem trivial or of poor report to you, I am sure.

"I had lived for three years on an Indian Reservation in Canada. The

Koviloor Digital Library

Swami was never tired of listening to anecdotes about the Red men. One I remember amused him greatly. An Indian whose wife had just died came to the Parsonage for some nails for her coffin. While waiting he asked my cook if she would marry him ! Naturally she was very indignant, and in reply to her sorrowful refusal the man only said, 'Wait, you see'. The following Sunday much to our amusement he came and sat upon one of the gate posts. He had a feather stuck jauntily in his hat, and hair oil, of which he had been most prodigal, was trickling down his cheeks. It happened that the Swami was giving sittings for his portrait just then and we went to the Studio to see how the portrait was progressing. Just as I entered the Studio a little oil ran down the cheek of the portrait, and the Swami seeing it said instantly, 'Getting ready to marry the cook !'.....Knowing the Swami as you did, you must have realised what an exquisite sense of humour he had....."

But of all other stories, two which he relished most and which sent him into fits of laughter, were those respectively of a new Christian missionary to a cannibal tribe, and that of the "darky" clergyman, preaching on "Creation." As to the former : There was once a Christian Missionary who newly arrived in a far-off island inhabited by cannibals, He proceeded to the chief of the place and asked him, "Well, how did you like my predecessor ?" The reply was, "He was simply de—li—cious." And as for the "darky" preacher,—he was shouting out, "Yo see, God was making Adam, and he was a-makin im out o' mud. And when he had a-got im made, he stucks im up again a fence to dry. And then —" "Hold on, there, preacher," suddenly cried out a learned listener. "What abouts dat ere fence ? Whos a-made dat fence ?" The preacher replied sharply : "Now youse listen here, Sam Jones. Don't youse be a gwining to ask such ere questions. Youse 'll ere smash up all theology."

Great souls are not always serious. Even ascetics and saints have their moments of relaxation. They often have the temperament of children, but they dedicate even their laughter unto God, as did the renowned Saint Francis of Assisi. The safety-valve of genius is the capacity to be even frivolous. As for the Swami, he could completely relax himself. This was as much a part of his greatness as were his intellectual powers and spiritual realisations. One would like

Koviloor Digital Library

to know the personal temperament, the personal incident, the human side of a teacher as well as his words of Revelation. Those who live in the personal environment of great men love them for their human qualities, and it was so with the disciples and admirers of the Swami Vivekananda. They would make every effort to divert his mind and they would invariably find that it led him to deliver his message all the clearer. Several of his most intimate friends, persons of position and wealth in the Western world, understood his need for rest and recreation, and invited him to spend short holidays at their residences. There he was allowed absolute personal freedom. Did he desire to talk, they would listen with rapt attention. They were struck with his childlike nature and knew that his temperament and genius manifested themselves best "when he was let alone." Did he desire to sing the songs of his own land, he could do so freely. If he sat in silent abstraction they left him to his mood. Times were when he would let loose the silence of days in a rhapsody of divine eloquence; and then again he would talk on matters that required no mental concentration. After giving some lecture that throbbed with spiritual power and realisation he would often dance in glee saying, "Thank God, it is over!" He would come down unexpectedly from the mountain-tops of insight to the levels of childlike simplicity in a moment. Thus the human side of the Swami struck his friends and disciples as a part of the divinity of Revelation and as indissoluble with the spiritual side of his personality.

With those in the West with whom he was particularly free he would say frankly whatever came into his mind. He called them oftentimes by familiar names as he did Mr. and Mrs. Hale, whom he styled "Father Pope" and "Mother Church"; another he called "Yum", "Jojo", and so on. When they prepared some delicious recipe he would look pleadingly at it, his eyes beaming with joy—and then, eat with his fingers as he was won't to do in India, saying that he *liked* to do so and that he enjoyed it more in that way. At first

Koviloor Digital Library

it shocked the Western sensibility, but then, they loved him and understood, and it became their pleasure to let him have his own way. They would be specially amused when in the privacy of their homes he would cast off his collar and throw off the boots which made him uncomfortable and slip his feet into a pair of house-slippers ; and as to cuffs, they were an abomination in his eyes. The Sannyâsin nature in him would resent at times all conventions and etiquette. His indifference to money was specially characteristic. It is told by his American disciples how he would often look with dread upon money he had received from friends for his own use, and would give it away freely to the poor or to those in need. Or it might be that he would immediately purchase presents for his friends and disciples, as was the case at Thousand Island Park when he was given a handsome purse at the end of his class work. The whole sum was spent in this way.

The Swami demanded personal freedom on all occasions ; and he either received it, or else shook himself free. He could not tolerate to be patronised ; and when a certain woman of wealth endeavoured to make him do as *she* desired in matters of plans and arrangements, he would break through them all. The fault was not with him. It was an eccentricity with this woman to "boss" others. She would be irritated for the time being and then later on say of him laughingly and lovingly, "At the last moment he upsets all my plans for him. He *must* have his own way. He is just like a mad bull in a china-shop". While he would go to any length when it was a matter of service or loyalty, he never allowed anyone to compel him to do certain things. And he certainly displayed wonderful patience with some whom he believed, in spite of personal irritation, to be instruments of the Will of the Lord in the helping of His cause. For otherwise, his first impulse would be to throw them overboard. He could not tolerate restraint.

According to him the monk should regulate his habits in consonance with the teaching of the Gita which says, "He who eats too much or he who eats too little, cannot be

Koviloor Digital Library

a Yogi. He who sleeps too much or sleeps too little cannot be a Yogi. To him who is temperate in eating and recreation, temperate in his effort for work, and in sleep and wakefulness, Yoga becomes the destroyer of misery." Therefore he took his hours of enjoyment as hours of preparation for work. But all along during the hours of his diversion one realised that this was only the apparent man, and that the real man was behind. There were times when he would say, "Oh! The body is a terrible bondage!" or "How I wish that I could 'hide myself for ever!'" and all would see the spirit in him as though chained in agony to the fetters of the flesh. Such moments often came to him, as for example, when he wrote his poems "My Play is Done," and "The Song of the Sannyâsin"; and here and there in scores of his letters this is evident. To cite what he wrote to Mrs. Bull :—

"I have a note-book which has travelled with me all over the world. I find therein these words written seven years ago : 'Now to seek a corner and lay myself down to die'. Yet all this karma remained. I hope I have worked it out."

"It appears like a hallucination that I was in these childish dreams of doing this and doing that. I am getting out of them. .....Perhaps these mad desires were necessary to bring me over to this country. And I thank the Lord for the experience."

When his disciples found him in such moods they feared that the Hour of Deliverance of which Sri Ramakrishna had spoken, might come on suddenly and the body drop. So they rejoiced to see him in his lighter moods.

An illustrative incident of the Swami's human side was told by one of his disciples in the city of Detroit. On a certain occasion he went to the house of one of his admirers and, with that unique sense of freedom and frankness which he had, he asked to be allowed to cook an Indian meal himself. The request was immediately granted, and then to the amusement of everyone present, he gathered from his pockets some score or more of tiny packets filled with finely-grounded condiments and spices. These had been sent all the way from India, and wherever he went these packets went with him. At one time, one of his choicest and most prized

Koviloor Digital Library

possessions was a bottle of *chutney* some gentleman had thoughtfully sent him from Madras. His Western disciples delighted to have him cook his own dishes in their kitchens. They helped him also in this, and thus time would pass by in merriment and making new experiments. He would make the dishes so hot with spices that they could only be palatable to a Western taste whetted by hunger, and many times the preparations took so long that when the food was ready to be served the party was literally ravenous. Then there would be much talk and laughter, and he would take the keenest delight in seeing how the Western tongue stood the hot-spiced dishes of distant Hindusthan. They were, no doubt, soothing to his high-strung temperament and tired nerves, but certainly not "good for his liver" as he insisted they were. This human side of the Swami bound his disciples to him in deep human love.

Nothing he enjoyed so much at times as to be seated cozily near a fire in winter-time and plunge into a reverie of reminiscences of his early days, which he would relate in a charming way to his friends and disciples. Or he would spend the morning or evening in reading comic papers and magazines from cover to cover. As for newspapers he betrayed the reporter's instinct in reading only the headlines. This was his diversion ; but at any moment the saint and prophet in him would merge fun in revelation. One disciple who could not understand him at first, unfortunately being in his presence only in his times of recreation, was one day suddenly made conscious of the Swami's true nature. This man saw the Master enjoying himself heartily. But when he asked him a question concerning religion, the countenance of the Swami changed instantly. Fun gave place to the revelation of the highest spiritual truths. The man says, "It seemed as though the Master had of a sudden cast aside the layer of that consciousness in which he had been then enjoying himself and made me aware of other layers *behind* the net-work of changing personality." But it was more than the power to transfigure his consciousness suddenly

Koviloor Digital Library

from fun to holiness and Jnânam that he manifested. He was actually possessed of a dual consciousness. Whilst he might be playing, as it were, on the surface of his personality, one was made aware *at the same moment* of the mighty flow of the ponderous depths beneath.

At the end of his American work he was thoroughly tired. Indeed, after he had made a railway journey it seemed for days as though the wheels of the trains revolved with their noise in his brain ; yet his head was always clear, though at times he grew exceedingly nervous. The work of the years of his Sâdhana in the East and teaching in the West, had been too much for him. His friends feared a complete breakdown ; and, as a matter of fact, secretly but surely his body was sinking, though he himself was the last to be conscious of this, and was all this time working harder than ever. His friends could not help seeing the cost to the body with which his spiritual message was uttered. They knew that he had given himself wholly and unstintingly in a glad self-sacrifice for the good of those who made his message the gospel of their lives.

As may be readily imagined there were many aspects of the Swami's personality and teachings during his stay in America, prior to his second visit to England, which must remain unknown forever. According to his disciples, "Each hour of the day there would be some new idea, some new human sweetness, some illuminating thought on the vastness of the soul and the divinity of man, some new, boundless hope, some startingly original plan that would radiate from his personality." One disciple says, "Simply to walk on the city streets with him, meant to be translated to marvellous worlds of thought or power suddenly from the sheerest fun." Still another records, "He always made one feel that he was all spirit and not the body, and this in spite of the fact that his magnificent physical frame irresistibly attracted the attention of every one." As an interesting and yet seriously suggestive aspect of his powerful personality a certain disciple has said :—

Kevilcor Digital Library

"It would be impossible for me to describe the overwhelming force of Swamiji's presence. He could rivet attention upon himself: and when he spoke in all seriousness and intensity,—though it seems well nigh incredible—there were some among his hearers who were literally exhausted. The subtlety of his thoughts and arguments swept them off their feet. In one case I know of a man who was forced to rest in bed for three days as the result of a nervous shock received by a discussion with the Swami. His personality was at once awe-inspiring and sublime. He had the faculty of literally annihilating one if he so chose."

On many an occasion he would draw out one who differed with him, leading him through the intricacies of much wit and logic to a position of bewilderment and silly confusion. And yet as a contrast, the very ones who were thus "prostrated by that radiant power" attested most to the sweetness he possessed. They said, "He is a marvellous combination of sweetness and irresistible force, verily a child and a prophet in one." Indeed, if all the descriptions of his ideas and personality at this period were recorded, they would of themselves constitute a complete volume.

All through his American work his mind was big with plans. From the very first it was his intention, when he had once gained a learned and extensive hearing and established his mission on a solid basis, to found a "Temple Universal," as he styled it, wherein should congregate, in harmony, all the religious sects of the world, worshipping but one symbol, "OM," which represents the Absolute. But his intense, all-absorbing work in founding his own Vedanta movement prevented him from carrying out this noble ideal.

Still another plan of his about which he had written to Mrs. Bull in the beginning of the year 1895, was to purchase lands in the Catskill mountains to the extent of one hundred and eight acres, where his students could go for Sâdhana during the summer holidays and build camps or cottages as they liked, until permanent buildings could be erected. He said that he would himself contribute the funds for buying this land. If anything, the Swami loved financial independence in his work. Then, also, he was exceedingly generous in frequently refusing assistance offered to him, suggesting to

Koviloor Digital Library

those who desired to do so that they should help others first whose works were more urgent and immediate.

It is a painful and unpleasant task to have constantly to revert to a recital of the slanders that were frequently heaped upon the Swami by self-seeking and malicious parties, but the demands of biographical treatment would not be fulfilled were this not done. The greatness of the Swami looms up larger on the horizon of true judgment when one knows what tremendous obstacles he was forced to encounter and how much suffering he experienced, AS A MONK, by the many lies circulated against his purity and temperance. One could have ignored them, were it not for the fact that at the time they were widely reported and gained some credence both in India and in America, and retarded the progress of his work by alienating from him, in several important instances, the devotion of disciples, and by arousing adverse criticism in his own country in particular. The conventional form of "hushing things up" may be excellent in its own place, but in the life of a great Teacher, all misconceptions and unjust estimates of his character should be removed, though it is true that the more he is slandered, the more devoted to him do his true disciples become and the more beautiful does his character shine forth. A biographer of the Swami therefore may feel quite justified in thrashing out the whole truth unhesitatingly.

There were two occasions in particular during his American work when his character was assailed. Maddened to desperation by the official reports that "because of Vivekananda's success and teaching the contributions to the Indian missionary funds have decreased in one year by as much as one million pounds," certain zealots of low-caste missionaries, circulated the story that "because of Vivekananda, Mrs. Bagley (the wife of the ex-governor of Michigan) has had to dismiss a servant-girl; he is dreadfully intemperate." Fortunately there are in existence three letters from the Bagley family which conclusively deny such fiendish statements. A letter

Kovilloor Digital Library

of the Swami written on March 21st., 1895, to Mrs. Ole Bull concerning these incidents is also in the possession of his disciples ; it reads :—

"I am astonished to hear the scandals the R——circle are indulging in about me. Among others, one item is that Mrs. Bagley of Detroit had to dismiss a servant-girl on account of my bad character ! ! ! Don't you see, Mrs. Bull, that however a man may conduct himself, there will always be persons who will invent the blackest lies about him. At Chicago I had such things spread every day against me.

"And these women are invariably the very Christian of Christians !.."

Other letters similar to this, which the Swami wrote at this time were filled with the bitterest indignation against the vicious slanderers who would even be willing to let their "souls go to hell itself" rather than let "this d——d Hindu", as some called him, "interfere with our work." The Swami could not realise why they should invent these charges against him. He was at first taken aback, but he took hope amidst the blackest despair when he learned through his friends that these persons had no prestige and standing amongst the honest, high-class Christians of liberal-minded America, that they were regarded as "blue-nosed," "hard-shelled" and "soft-shelled" fanatics and that they were chiefly drawn from the illiterate low-castes. The Swami marked well that none of the missionary bodies of standing and education, such as "The Oxford Mission," militated against him. What pleased him most during his stay in England, was to meet only with the kindest and most sympathetic treatment from the ecclesiastics there, and he knew that in America he had able and spirited defenders ; but of them all, the testimony of Mrs. Bagley herself and of her daughter, is particularly in point. Writing to a lady friend from Amisquam, Mass., on June 22nd., 1894, Mrs. Bagley says :—

"You write of my dear friend, Vivekananda. I am glad of an opportunity to express my admiration of his character, and it almost makes me indignant that any one should call him in question. He has given us in America higher ideas of life than we have ever had before. In Detroit, an old conservative city, in all the Clubs he is honoured as no one has ever been, and I can but feel that all who say one word against

Kovilpatti Digital Library

him are jealous of his greatness and his fine spiritual perceptions ;—and yet how can they be ? He does nothing to make them so.'

"He has been a revelation to Christians,.....he has made possible for us all a diviner and more noble practical life. As a religious teacher and an example to all I do not know of his equal. It is so wrong and so untrue to say that he is intemperate. All who have been brought in contact with him day by day, speak enthusiastically of his sterling qualities of character, and men in Detroit who judge most critically, and who are unsparing, admire and respect him.....He has been a guest in my house more than three weeks, and my sons as well as my son-in-law and my entire family found Swami Vivekananda a gentleman always, most courteous and polite, a charming companion and an ever-welcome guest. I have invited him to visit us at my summer-home here at Amisquam, and in my family he will always be honoured and welcomed. I am really sorry for those who say aught against him, more than I am angry, for they know so little what they are talking about. He has been with Mr. and Mrs. Hale of Chicago much of the time while in that city. I think that has been his home. They invited him first as guest and later were unwilling to part with him. They are Presbyterians ;.....they are known as cultivated and refined people, and they admire, respect and love Vivekananda. He is a strong, noble human being, one who walks with God. He is as simple and trustful as a child. In Detroit I gave him an evening reception, inviting ladies and gentlemen, and two weeks afterwards he lectured to invited guests in my parlour.....I had included lawyers, judges, ministers, army-officers, physicians and business-men with their wives and daughters. Vivekananda talked two hours on 'The Ancient Hindu Philosophers and What They Taught.' All listened with intense interest to the end. Wherever he spoke people listened gladly and said, 'I never heard man speak like that.' He does not antagonise, but lifts people up to a higher level——they see something beyond the man-made creeds and denominational names, and they feel one with him in their religious beliefs.

"Every human being would be made better by knowing him and living in the same house with him..... I want every one in America to know Vivekananda, and if India has more such let her send them to us....."

Again in another letter, dated March 20th., 1895, she writes in reply to the same lady :—

"* * * Let my first word be that all this about Swami Vivekananda is an absolute falsehood from beginning to end. Nothing could be more false. We all enjoyed every day of the six weeks he spent with us..... He was invited by the different clubs of gentlemen in Detroit, and

Koviloor Digital Library

dinners were given him in beautiful homes so that greater numbers might meet him and talk with him and hear him talk....., and everywhere and at all times he was, as he deserved to be, honoured and respected. No one can know him without respecting his integrity and excellence of character and his strong religious nature. At Amisquam last summer I had a cottage and we wrote Vivekananda, who was in Boston, inviting him again to visit us there, which he did, remaining three weeks, not only conferring a favour upon us, but a great pleasure, I am sure, to friends who had cottages near us. My servants, I have had many years and they are all still with me. Some of them went with us to Amisquam, the others were at home. You can see how wholly without foundation are all these stories. Who this woman in Detroit is, of whom you speak, I do not know. I only know this that every word of her story is as untrue and false as possible..... We all know Vivekananda. Who are they that speak so falsely ?....."

This dignified and powerful refutation of the scandals circulated against the Swami was supplemented by another letter written on the following day by Mrs. Bagley's daughter, (Helen Bagley). It reads :—

"I am glad to know that the story was not circulated by R——. If I find it possible I wish to see Mrs. S—— and ask her what her authority for such a statement was. I shall do it quietly of course, but I am going to find out for once if possible who starts these lies about Vivekananda. These things travel fast, and if once one is uprooted, perhaps these women will stop to think before they circulate a story so readily. If only they would investigate them they would find how false they all are....."

The Swami, as a matter of fact, knew too well, that he had little cause to feel either himself or his work seriously molested by the many attacks on his personality. He KNEW that he had never broken the vows of the Sannyâsin life. Then, too, he had the satisfaction of knowing that thousands of others regarded and knew him as a man of absolute purity and unparalleled integrity. Besides, from every quarter of America reports of his teaching and of its influence came pouring in. The only occasion when he was seriously incensed, was when certain parties, securing the photograph of his Master, managed to have it printed in one of the leading papers of a large Mid-Western city, together with slurring comments upon his appearance and upon

Kovilloor Digital Library

Hinduism and Hindu Yogis in general. Then he was heard to exclaim, "Oh ! This *is* BLASPHEMY !"

In striking contrast to these serious unpleasantnesses, arising so frequently during his stay in America, he had as a real consolation the thought that he was reverenced and loved by the finest minds in the land. Even before his noteworthy public reception at the Harvard University in 1896, he had been received privately in September of 1894 by some members of the University faculty and by many of the graduate philosophical students. Following close upon this, the Columbia University offered him the Chair of Professorship in Sanskrit, which honour he had to decline being the Sannyâsin that he was.

It was at this time that the Swami met the distinguished Professor William James of Harvard through the arrangement of Mrs. Ole Bull, who was anxious to introduce him into the very finest intellectual circles. The occasion was a dinner party at her residence. Little progress at real acquaintanceship was made at the time of dinner proper. Afterwards the gentlemen retired to an adjoining room and the Swami and the Professor drew together in earnest and subdued conversation. It was midnight when they both rose from their long discourse. Eager to know how the meeting of these two great minds had resulted, Mrs. Bull asked, "Well, Swami, how did you like Professor James ?" He replied, in a sort of abstracted way, "A very nice man, a very nice man !" laying emphasis on the word nice. The next day the Swami handed a letter to Mrs. Bull with the casual remark, "You may be interested in this." Mrs. Bull read and to her amazement saw that Professor James, in inviting the Swami to meet him at his own residence for dinner a few days later, had addressed him as "Master." The tribute of Professor James's regard for Swamiji is evinced, on many occasions, in his writings, and he speaks of him deferentially as "that paragon of Vedantists." In his classical work, "The Variety of Religious Experience" he specially refers to the Swami in connection with monistic

Koviloor Digital Library

mysticism. In his celebrated essay, "The Energies of Men," he speaks of a University professor who underwent the Râja Yoga practices as a cure for nervous disorders, and who received thereby not only physical benefit but intellectual and spiritual illumination as well. There are many who believe that in this essay Professor James was describing his own experiences of the Râja Yoga practices as instructed by the Swami.

As for the Swami himself, he could cure diseases even by the sheer force of his will, though he never cared to exercise such psychic powers. There was the instance of a lady whom out of compassion he cured instantly of a bad type of hay-fever. She was living with him at the time as a fellow-guest of a mutual friend. It is best to let her describe her own experience as she wrote of it many years later to a lady-disciple of the Swami :—

"I had a very bad attack of hay fever while I was staying with my friend, and the Swami seeing how very uncomfortable and restless I was, said to me, 'Shall I cure you ?' I told him that I should be delighted if he would ; whereupon he took his seat in front of me and asked me to lay my hands upon his palms. I did so and he closed his eyes and seemingly lost consciousness. His hands became very cold and he seemed to have become rigid. After a time, whether short or long I could never tell, he opened his eyes, got up and left the room abruptly, and I was surprised to find that my fever had left me entirely....."

The secret of the Swami's success in healing is found in a letter written by him on May 20th, 1895, to one of his *gurubhâis*. Therein he says :—

".....Now I tell you of a curious fact. Whenever any one of you is sick, let him himself or anyone of you visualise him in your mind, and mentally say and strongly imagine that he is all right. That will cure him quickly. You can do it even without his knowledge, and even with thousands of miles between you. Remember it and do not be ill any more....."

It must always be remembered that the Swami met influential personages of other fields of thought, besides the strictly religious, and they were charmed with his knowledge of science and arts. As early as September 1893, immediately following his appearance at the Parliament, he was introduced

Koyiloor Digital Library

to a group of far-famed scientists at a vegetarian dinner given especially in his honour by Professor Elisha Grey, the electrical inventor, and his wife in their beautiful residence, Highland Park, Chicago. It was at this time that the Electrical Congress was being held, and thus, amongst other distinguished guests who were invited to meet the Swami, there were Sir William Thompson, afterwards Lord Kelvin, Professor Helmholtz and Ariton Hopitallia. The Swami's knowledge of electricity amazed the scientists, and his shining repartees bearing on the matters of science were greeted with sincere pleasure. With one voice they acclaimed him as a sympathetic confrére.

There were, of course, scores of lectures given by the Swami, now lost, apart from those which have been incorporated in the "Complete Works" as belonging to the period of his first stay in America. In 1893 he gave a series of lectures in and around Chicago, and the whole of the next year was spent in lecturing throughout the country. In 1894, he made his home for a time with the Guernsey family, the members of which regarded him as "Master" and opened out for him numerous opportunities for holding classes and conversaziones. It was at this time that he met Dr. Lyman Abbot, and was also invited to dine with the editors of the *Outlook*. Those known as the "Barber Lectures," were given in 1895 under the patronage of Mrs Barber, a society lady of Boston. At Amisquam, where he was twice the guest of Mrs. Bagley of Michigan, taking short holidays there in 1894 and in 1895, he gave one public lecture and a number of conversaziones. From January to April 1895, he gave numerous lectures at his own quarters in New York, and in the following month concluded his public lectures in Mott's Memorial Building with "The Science of Religion" and "The Rationale of Yoga", his leading thought being, "Unity in variety is the plan of Nature", thus reconciling in one sentence the opposing thought-systems of the monistic and the pluralistic outlook, with a rare intellectual ability which on many occasions aroused the interest of

Koviloor Digital Library

some of the foremost American philosophers. Among the many receptions accorded him during his stay in New York, several of the more successful ones were inaugurated by Miss Phillips. And many who heard him would refer to his gentle, persuasive, spiritual love that made his speeches and illustrations not only helpful, but as poetic as they were simple." Speaking of him at this period, one of his lady-disciples wrote to a friend :—

"The noble, pure, generous qualities of the man I have been sure of to my own satisfaction. But his ability to quietly and steadfastly work under difficult conditions and with opposing temperaments and to call out the best in every one, he has demonstrated specially this past season."

But the fearless outspokenness of the Swami often alienated that general approval for which so many public workers slave and sacrifice their true views and their principles; but the Swami was not of that sort. And, after all, he found that the American public, though at first it might appear to resent would afterwards regard with great admiration one who dared speak openly of what he felt were the drawbacks of American civilisation. It so happened that he once spoke in Boston before a large audience gathered to hear him on "My Master." Full of the fire of renunciation that he was, when he saw before him the audience composed, for the most part, of worldly-minded men and women with cruel, cunning faces and a lack of spiritual sympathy and earnestness, a mood came upon him and he felt that it would be a desecration to speak, on such an occasion, of his understanding of, and his real feelings of devotion for Sri Ramakrishna. So, instead of dwelling on his subject, he launched out in a terrible denunciation of the vulgar, physical and materialistic ideas which underlay the whole of Western civilisation. Hearing this, hundreds of people left the hall abruptly, but in no way affected, he went on as before with his summary accusal of a nation that had heretofore blindly regarded the culture of his own land as "horribly heathen and abominably benighted." The next morning the papers were filled with varying criticisms, some highly favourable, others severely

Kovilgor Digital Library

critical in their analysis of what he had said, but all commenting on his fearlessness, sincerity and frankness. But that he ever denounced American women, as some of his bitter antagonists have said, is a gross prevarication. The Swami's own words live to testify to his high opinion concerning them and to his sincere gratitude for the uniform kindness they had shown him.

One of the interesting lectures that the Swami gave during his visit to Boston at the latter part of 1894, when he was the guest of Mrs. Ole Bull, was that on "The Ideals of Indian Women." At that lady's special invitation he gave this lecture to the women of Cambridge, a suburb of Boston. This address which was deep, stirring and patriotic, dwelt on the beauty of character and the ideals of Indian Womanhood in general, and the idea of Indian Motherhood in particular. It was as well, though unconsciously, a reply to the remarks which many ignorant or self-interested persons had circulated concerning the "degraded" condition of Indian womanhood. So much impressed was the gathering of prominent ladies with the Swami's address that in the time of the approaching Christmas they sent, unbeknown to the Swami himself, the following letter to his mother, in far-off India, together with a beautiful picture of the Child Jesus, in the lap of the Virgin Mary :—

"To

"THE MOTHER OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA,

"DEAR MADAM,

"At this Christmas tide, when the gift of Mary's son to the world is celebrated and rejoiced over with us, it would seem the time of remembrance. We, who have your son in our midst, send you greeting. His generous service to men, women and children in our midst was laid at your feet by him, in an address he gave us the other day on the Ideals of Motherhood in India. The worship of his Mother will be to all who heard him an inspiration and an uplift.

"Accept, dear Madam, our grateful recognition of your life and work in and through your son. And may it be accepted by you as a slight token of remembrance to serve in its use as a tangible reminder that the

Kovilpur Digital Library
world is coming to its true inheritance from God, of Brotherhood and Unity."

Referring to this lecture Mrs. Bull has written :—

"* * * Having given from the Vedas, from Sanskrit literature and the dramas these Ideals, and having cited the laws of to-day favourable to the women of India, he paid his filial homage to his own mother as having enabled him to do the best he had done, by her life of unselfish love and purity, that caused him by his very inheritance to choose the life of a a monk. ....."

It was conspicuous in the Swami that wherever he went he paid the highest tribute to his mother, whensoever the occasion arose. One of his lady-friends, recalling the few happy weeks she was privileged to spend with him under the same roof of a mutual friend, writes :—

"He spoke often of his mother. I remember his saying that she had wonderful self-control, and that he had never known any woman who could fast so long. She had once gone without food, he said, for as many as fourteen days together. And it was not uncommon for his followers to hear such words upon his lips as, 'It was my mother who inspired me to this. Her character was a constant inspiration to my life and work.'

Acknowledgments of his work were forthcoming from every quarter. That presented to him by the Brooklyn Ethical Association, on April 7th., 1895, reflects the spirit of scores of others. It reads :—

"Resolved, that the Brooklyn Ethical Association desires to express its sincere appreciation of the lectures delivered to its members and the Brooklyn public during the past season by the Swami Vivekananda of India, and in thanking him for the earnest and eloquent address delivered to us we desire to add our commendation of the high motive and earnest purpose evident in his work before us and to recommend him to all bodies of men and women in America or elsewhere, who desire to enter upon any earnest study of comparative religion.

(Signed) LEWIS G. JANES,

President."

In the midst of the luxuries and comforts of American life how Swamiji's heart yearned to be in the old associations of the life of the free monk in India, is revealed in the touching thoughts he penned in the following letter written from Greenacre, to the Hale sisters :—

Kovilpur Digital Library

"The other night the camp people went to sleep beneath the Pine tree under which I sit every morning *à la* Hindu and talk to them. Of course I went with them and we had a nice night under the stars, sleeping on the lap of mother earth, and I enjoyed every bit of it. I cannot describe to you that night's glories—after a year of brutal life that I have led—to sleep on the ground, to meditate under the tree in the forest. * * * The camp people are healthy, young, sincere and holy men and women. I teach them all 'Shivoham ! Shivoham !' and they all repeat it, innocent and pure as they are and brave beyond all bounds, and so I am happy and glorified. Thank God for making me poor, thank God for making these children poor !"

Of the many descriptions of the Swami in America, the following extracts from a newspaper report is interesting :—

"One day, at an unfashionable place by the sea, the professor was seen crossing the lawn between the boarding-house and his cottage accompanied by a man in a long red coat. The coat, which had something of a priestly cut, descended far below the man's knees, and was girded around his waist with a thick cord of the same reddish orange tint. He walked with a strange, shambling gait, and yet there was a commanding dignity and impressiveness in the carriage of his neck and bare head that caused everyone in sight to stop and look at him ; he moved slowly, with the swinging tread of one who had never hastened, and in his great dark eyes was the beauty of an alien civilisation which might,—should time and circumstance turn it into opposition,—become intolerably repulsive. He was dark, about the colour of a light quadroon, and his full lips, which in a man of Caucasian race would have been brilliant scarlet, had a tint of bluish purple. His teeth were regular, white, and sometimes cruel, but his beautiful expressive eyes and the proud wonderful carriage of his head, the swing and grace of the heavy crimson tassels that hung from the end of his sash, made one forget that he was too heavy for so young a man, and that long sitting on the floor had visited him with the fate of the tailor.

"* * * He seemed very young, even younger than his twenty-nine, years, and as he seated himself he covered his legs carefully with his flowing robe, like a woman or a priest ; but the hoary ancient turn of his thought belied his childlike manner.

"* * * And then, having said his say, the Swami was silent. .....Occasionally he cast his eye up to the roof and repeated softly 'Shiva, Shiva, Shiva !'.....And a current of powerful feeling seemed to be flowing like molten lava beneath the silent surface of this strange being.....

Koviloor Digital Library

"He stayed days among them, keenly interested in all practical things; his efforts to eat strange food were heroic and sometimes disastrous to himself. He was constantly looking about for something which would widen the possibilities of feeding his people in times of famine. Our ways seemed to inspire him with a sort of horror, meat-eating cannibals that we seemed to be! But he concealed it, either with absolute dumbness, or by a courteous flow of language which effectually hid his thoughts.

"He had been brought up amidst polemics and his habit of argument was mainly Socratic, beginning insidiously and simply by a story, or clear statement of some incontestable fact, and then from that deriving strange and unanswerable things. All through, his discourses abounded in picturesque illustration and beautiful legends. To work, to get on in the world, in fact, any measure of temporal success seemed, to him, entirely beside the subject. He had been trained to regard the spiritual life as the real thing of this world! Love of God and love of man! • • • 'The love of the Hindu,' he told us, 'goes further than the love of the Christian, for that stops at man; but the religion of Buddha goes on towards the beasts of the field and every creeping thing that has life.'

"At sixteen he had renounced the world and spent his time among men who rejoiced in these things and looked forward to spending day after day on the banks of the Ganges, talking of the higher life.

"When someone suggested to him that Christianity was a saving power, he opened his great dark eyes upon him and said, 'If Christianity is a saving power in itself, why has it not saved the Ethiopians, the Abyssinians?' He also arraigned our own crimes, the horror of women on the stage, the frightful immorality in our streets, our drunkenness, our thieving, our political degeneracy, the murdering in our West, the lynching in our South, and we, remembering his own Thugs, were still too delicate to mention them.

"• • • • • He cared for Thomas á Kempis more than for any other writer and had translated a part of the 'Imitation of Christ' into Bengali and wrote an introduction to it; as for receiving the Stigmata, he spoke of it as the natural result of an agonising love of God. The teaching of the Vedas, constant and beautiful, he applied to every event in life, quoting a few verses and then translating, and with the translation of the story giving the meaning. His mouth, also, was full of wonderful proverbs. 'Of what use is the knowledge that is locked away in books?' he said, in speaking of the memories of Hindu boys.

"Himself a Hindu monk, he told, once, of a time when he turned into a forest, a trackless forest, because he felt that God was leading him, of how he went on for three days, starving, and how he was more perfectly happy than he had ever been before because he felt that he was

Kavilook Digital Library

entirely in the hands of God. 'When my time comes,' he said, 'I shall like to go up the mountain and there, by the Ganges, lay myself down, and with the water singing over me I shall go to sleep, and above me will tower the Himalayas—men have gone mad for those mountains!' There was once a monk, he told us, who went far up into the mountains and saw them everywhere about him, and above his head towered their great white crests. Far below, thousands of feet, was the Ganges, narrow stream at the foot of a precipice. 'Shall I then like a dog die in my bed when all this beauty is around me?' and he plunged into the chasm.

"The Hindu monks have no monasteries, no property..... According to him, the monks were not required to do penance, or to worship. They were, in short, minor deities to the Hindu people; but yet the Swami was wonderfully unspoiled and simple, claiming nothing for himself, playing with the children, twirling a stick between his fingers with laughing skill and glee at their inability to equal him.

"All the people of that little place were moved and excited by this young man, in a manner beyond what might be accounted for by his coming from a strange country and a different people. He had another power, an unusual ability to bring his hearers into vivid sympathy with his own point of view. It repelled, in some cases, however, as strongly as it attracted, but whether in support or opposition, it was difficult to keep a cool head or a level judgment when confronted with him.

"All the people of all degrees were interested; women's eyes blazed and their cheeks were red with excitement; even the children of the village talked of what he had said to them; all the idle summer boarders trooped to hear him and all the artists longingly observed him and wanted to paint him.

"He told strange stories as ordinary people would mention the wonders of electricity, curious feats of legerdemain, and tales of monks who had lived one hundred, or one hundred and thirty years; but so-called occult societies drew down his most magnificent contempt..... He spoke of holy men who at a single glance converted hardened sinners and detected men's inmost thoughts.....But these things were trifles; always his thoughts turned back to his people. He lived to raise them up and make them better and had come this long way in the hope of gaining help to teach them, to be practically more efficient. We hardly knew what he needed: money, if money would do it; tools, advice, new ideas. And for this he was willing to die to-morrow.....

"His great heroine was the dreadful Rani of the Indian Mutiny, who led her troops in person.....There was one man of them, who had become a monk in order to hide himself, who had lost four sons and could speak of them with composure; but whenever he mentioned the Rani he would

Koviloor Digital Library

weep, with tears streaming down his face. 'That woman was a goddess,' he said, 'a Devi. When overcome, she fell on her sword and died like a man.'

"In quoting from the Upanishads his voice was most musical. He would quote a verse in Sanskrit with intonations and then translate it into beautiful English, of which he had a wonderful command. And, in his mystical religion, he seemed perfectly and unquestionably happy.

"* * * * And yet, when they gave him money, it seemed as if some injury had been done him and some disgrace put upon him. 'Of all the worries I have ever had,' he said, as he left us, 'the greatest has been the care of this money!' His horrified reluctance to take it haunted us. He could not be made to see why he might not wander on in this country, as in his own, without touching a medium of exchange, which he considered disgraceful, and the pain he showed when it was made clear to him that without money he could not even move, hung round us for days after he left, as if we had hurt some innocent thing or had wounded a soul. .....And we saw him leave us after that one little week of knowing him; with the fear that clutches the heart when a beloved, gifted, passionate child fares forth, unconscious, in an untried world."

This beautiful and interesting description of the Swami is only one out of hundreds that were written of him at the time. All his friends recognised in him what Mrs. Leggett so aptly mentions, namely, that "He was a Grand Seignior." And this lady says, "There were but two celebrated personages whom I have met, that could make one feel perfectly at ease without themselves for an instant losing their own dignity,—one was the German Emperor, the other, the Swami Vivekananda." Truly, he was always "Norendra Nath," the lord even of the princes of men; truly he was, as the American papers spoke of him, "The Lordly Monk."

Surveying the history of his work, one sees the Swami Vivekananda moving through the West as some mighty, glorious and effulgent light. Reckoned as a Plato in thought, as a modern Savonarola in his fearless outspokenness, and adored as a Master and as a Prophet, the Swami moved amongst his disciples as some grand Bodhisattva amongst His devotees. Some looked upon him even as a Buddha, others as a Christ, some as a Rishi of the Upanishads, whilst others as a Sankaracharya; and all regarded

Koviloor Digital Library

him as the embodiment of the Highest Consciousness. And certainly, when one listens to the words that were heralded in the tense stillness of that hour which followed his wild reception at the Parliament of Religions, one can only think of him as one speaking with Authority, having realised the Divinity he preached. His hands, raised in continual benediction, his voice, murmuring or thundering, as it might be, the Gospel of the Highest Consciousness, his face beaming with love and goodwill, the Swami Vivekananda lives in the memory of America as "One who walks with God," and verily as the Man with a Message for the West.

To have struck at the very root of the materialistic spirit, to have given the Advaita Consciousness and a clear insight into the religion of the Vedanta to the peoples of the West was his glorious mission, the achievement of which has elevated him to the exalted position of a veritable "Jagad-Guru" or World-Teacher. And India's is the Glory.

Sweetness, majesty, power, resignation, renunciation, radiance, holiness, aye, Divinity Itself, surround him as he passes in the perspective of that time. And above all,—apart from his numerous lectures and classes and multifarious work,—one pauses before his personality to adore ; and standing in his presence it is indeed felt that one stands on holy ground. And so far as the perspective itself is concerned, it widens and becomes a thousandfold enriched. England and India call to him ; and then it is America again ; and finally India ; but wherever he may be, it is always the supra-mundane consciousness which leads him. How distinctly one sees him as he passes on ! He is so near and dear ! One cannot help exclaiming, "Blessed and Beloved Swamiji !" And yet in the passing of his personality as it soars up to higher and still higher things, one is made aware of a certain Supra-personal Vastness and Reality, and the soul finds itself enveloped in an atmosphere of Power and of Peace, nay, verily, of Divinity made manifest !

THE END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

Koviloor Digital Library

PRINTER'S ERRORS.

PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
3	32	Tremend	Tremend—
9	12	by resident	by a resident
12	1	unconsciously	unconsciously
14	33	all the were	they were all
16	28	luminousity	luminosity
26	28	were	was
"	29	throurgh	through
29	13	respcet	respect
30	16	of schools	schools of
35	20	Mahâmâki	Mâhâmâyâki
"	32	to day	to-day
36	18	lookin	look in
42	34	and and	and
51	12	and and	and
53	29	Brother	Brothers
55	30	those	these
68	34	Smaskâra,	Samskâara,
69	4	caste.	caste and egotism,
75	4	work,	work.
78	1	Himalayas,	Himalayas,"
79	13	Seriouslyl	seriously
80	37	disciple, of	disciple and of
95	1	Master?	Master?—
"	25	terribble	terrible
116	33	The uponing	They
119	37	inevitably	invariably
121	5	diphetheria	diptheria
126	4	palacces	palaces
149	4	man.	man."
158	8	circum spection	circumspection
194	8	court the,	court, the
227	33	bittreness	bitterness
235	10	*Sandhyâvandanâm*	*Sandhyâvandanam*
"	"	or prayers,	or prayers
237	37	versatioa	versation
241	31	tims	time
258	26	dis:rimina tion	discrimination

Koviloor Digital Library

PRINTER'S ERRORS

PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
263	8	On a ship	On board a ship
263	„	his board	his
267	32	templed edicated	temple dedicated
269	14	eccleasiastics	ecclesiastics
271	8	Form	For
275	32	darley	dearly
279	33	there.'	there !
280	7	merchat	merchant
281	8	fasionable	fashionable
281	19	amarzed	amazed
289	36	aspects	aspe :
292	23	moveover	moreover
297	12	their	their
304	9	insight wherwith spiritual	spiritual insight wherewith
309	8	von	you
313	29	whereever	wherever
333	29	diabolisims	diabolisms
335	21	happenings	happening
336	34	speakof	speak of
345	4	he	the
352	10	Soul	Saul
371	24	dwell	dwelt
376	34	देवि	देवि
„	„	ब्रह्मवादिनो	ब्रह्मवादिनी
401	16	occassion	occasion
406	13	listeners',	listeners'
„	38	Raphæl	Raphael
408	14	But"—	But—"
414	20	Coun.,	Conn.,
418	23	half-humoros	half-humorous
„	26	Encyclopedœa	Encyclopædia
419	41	W	We need
447	4	his	"his
450	42	beng	being
452	7	Ganges,	Ganges, a